

WHO ELSE HIRES A SOMALI?
THE CHALLENGES OF INCORPORATING NEWCOMERS IN NEW
IMMIGRATION DESTINATIONS:
THE CASE OF EMPORIA, KANSAS

BY

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Abstract

This study examines the range of responses to Somali newcomers in Emporia, Kansas, in schools, in the health community, in the Emporia Refugee Resettlement Alliance (ERRA), and in the local media. Based on data gathered in in-depth interviews, observation of ERRA meetings, and close study of local news stories and an online forum, the study focuses on barriers to incorporation of the Somali newcomers into the community. Challenges arose not only from practical considerations such as meeting the need for English language classes and interpreting, health screenings, and driver's education, but also from widespread rumors and misinformation regarding the refugee population. It is suggested that the media, including interactive online media, could be a powerful tool for promoting understanding and providing a mediating structure between established residents and newcomers.

Chapter 1: Introduction

I first heard about the Somali refugees in Emporia, Kansas in November, 2007, when, eighty miles away in Lawrence, Kansas, I heard the rumors of Emporia's Somali "influx." A quick internet search brought me to an article on the *Emporia Gazette's* website: "Emporia Readies for More Somali Refugees" (Mlynar 2008g). The story, which described a meeting of the Emporia Refugee Resettlement Alliance (ERRA), had sparked a flurry of controversy. The readers' forum following the online article was filled with unwelcoming comments posted by anonymous users. A few weeks later, I read another *Gazette* article about a community meeting regarding refugee resettlement in Emporia that attracted a standing room only crowd in the town's William Allen White auditorium. The *Gazette* article on this hours-long meeting reported a number of negative comments and concerns about the new refugee population, convincing me that the controversy was not confined to the online forum. I immediately made plans to attend a meeting of the ERRA and find out more.

This thesis follows the various responses to the Somali newcomers in Emporia, from March 2006 when the first Somali community members arrived, to the formation of the Emporia Refugee Resettlement Alliance later that year, to the closing of the facility where many of the Somali newcomers worked in 2008, spurring their emigration from Emporia. The following chapters address several questions about the incorporation of newcomers in Emporia. How do interview

respondents in Emporia compare the community's response to Somali newcomers to the response to earlier waves of newcomers? How were the Somali newcomers depicted in the press and in the online readers' forum? To what extent do the experiences of healthcare workers and educators confirm the fears that the Somali newcomers would overwhelm the health and education systems? How did the Emporia Refugee Resettlement Alliance approach cross-cultural education, and what did ERRA members learn from this experience?

Emporia's experience with receiving immigrants is not entirely unique. The city is one of several nonmetropolitan Midwestern communities that have recently experienced the arrival of rapidly growing newcomer populations. Shifts in immigration patterns in the United States, specifically those changes brought about by restructuring in the meat industry, which has altered the demographic makeup of towns like Emporia, are discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 details some examples of towns that, like Emporia, have received Somali refugees who have filled local jobs in meat processing. These examples reveal the attitudes that may await Somali refugees in new immigration destinations. Chapter 5 introduces Emporia and Emporia's Hispanic community, since many interview respondents compared and contrasted the Somali newcomers with Hispanic newcomers. This chapter also discusses how, according to the perceptions of interview respondents, the Somali newcomers fit into Emporia's immigration history. Chapter 6 discusses the response to the Somali newcomers in the media, in schools, in healthcare, and in the Emporia Refugee Resettlement Alliance, an organization that linked community leaders from a variety

of sectors. Chapter 7 summarizes the barriers to the incorporation of newcomers in Emporia and suggests approaches to overcoming these barriers.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This thesis is based on information gathered through direct observation of meetings of the Emporia Refugee Resettlement Alliance, in-depth interviews with ERRA members and other Emporians who took on active roles in easing the process of incorporating the Somali newcomers into the community, and study of the many local newspaper articles regarding the Somali newcomers as well as the newspaper's online forum.

After attending my first ERRA meeting in December 2007, I continued attending meetings in February, March and April 2008. I was added to the ERRA mailing list and received email communications and meeting minutes that were distributed to members. After the organization disbanded, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with individuals who were integral members of the ERRA: the Director of the Community Health Center¹, the hospital's Director of Social Services, two Registered Nurses in public health who worked directly with the TB program, the SRS Regional Refugee Coordinator, the SRS State Refugee Coordinator, the director of Friends in Faith Serving Emporia, the President of Friends in Faith Serving Emporia, the school district's Migrant Community Resource Coordinator/Recruiter, a co-director of the Adult Education Center, the English

¹ Interview respondents gave permission to use data gathered during the interviews without associating that data with their names. Professional titles have been used here in place of names to indicate the range of community members included in this research project.

Language Acquisition (ELA) Coordinator at the Flint Hills Learning Center, and an Emporia city official. These were all in-person interviews. I loosely followed the interview guide, but adjusted the questions depending on the specific information that the individual respondent might be able to provide. For example, I asked school officials not only about the community response in general or the response of the ERRA but also the specific response to newcomers in the schools. The average interview lasted approximately fifty minutes. I recorded these interviews and listened to the recordings as soon as possible after the interviews were complete to take detailed notes. The Community Liaison for the Tyson Emporia Complex, a Somali woman who had been deeply involved in the ERRA and had arrived in Emporia before the first group of Somali newcomers, was out-of-state and unavailable for an in-person interview, but was kind enough to agree to a telephone interview.

I also interviewed community members who, although not directly involved in the ERRA, had frequent interactions with the Somali community. These individuals could be described as community leaders, including the President of the League of Women voters, a long-time Emporia resident who had worked to organize panel discussions on immigration and social “mixers” to get to know Somali women, a Friends in Faith member who also participated in the women’s circles, and an Emporia Middle School teacher who organized a Somali speakers’ panel for the middle school students in response to his students’ gossip about the refugees. I also conducted informal interviews with an Emporia High School teacher of English as a Second Language, the Public Education Director of the Lyon County Historical

Museum, the Founder of Las Casitas Association, and a social sciences professor at Emporia State University.

Although my initial goal was to learn about interactions between established residents and Somali newcomers in the ERRA and in the other community organizations that interview respondents represented, I began to hear trends in the ways that respondents reflected on Emporia's history of receiving newcomers. Thus I asked later respondents about how the Somali newcomers were received in comparison to earlier groups of newcomers. Another topic that arose repeatedly in these interviews was the importance of the media. Respondents frequently talked about how their organizations interacted with the local news media or how their organizations were impacted by news stories. They also had a great deal to say about the local newspaper's online forum. These interviews led me to question the role of the media in the incorporation of newcomers in new immigration destinations.

Finally, I sifted through the many local newspaper stories, editorials, and forum postings on the local newspaper's website. The *Emporia Gazette* was a major player in the story of Emporia's response to the Somali refugees. Not only did the *Gazette* website publicize numerous news stories and editorials relating to the newcomers, it also featured an interactive component, a public forum, in which readers could sound off by posting responses to individual articles. The forum postings on *Gazette* stories related to the Somalis posted in November 2007 became so numerous that a separate thread was opened for discussion of refugee resettlement. This single thread alone garnered 1,221 postings between November

2007 and March 2008. Threads on other topics in the forum mostly have fewer than 50 entries. The forum was important to this story not because it tells us how Emporians really felt about the Somali newcomers– the postings were anonymous and it is impossible to tell exactly how many individuals were posting comments, and how many of these individuals may have been from out of town. A number of Emporians, however, did post their concerns and felt strongly enough to speak out publicly, albeit anonymously. Some of these individuals organized a public meeting online and met in person in November 2007. In addition, city officials followed what was being said in these forums in order to try to stay abreast of sources of tension in the community. Topics of discussion in the forum, then, are mentioned here as they represent some of the sources of debate that were addressed by the ERRRA and the city of Emporia.

The terms used to categorize residents in Emporia are complicated by multiple constructions of belonging and exclusion. In *Structuring Diversity*, Lamphere used the terms “established residents” and “newcomers.” Members of minority or majority populations who have lived in the United States for at least a generation are considered established residents, while those who have arrived more recently are considered newcomers. These designations are useful since they shift the focus away from ethnicity. In Emporia, for example, one individual who may be categorized as Hispanic may be a recent immigrant, while another may be among the second or third generation of his family born in the United States. These individuals may have very different relationships to the community as a whole. Some Emporians

point out that new immigrant groups are marginalized even by community members who are ethnically similar. I have adopted the established resident and newcomer designations in this thesis since the terms appropriately describe this separation between descendants of immigrants and newer arrivals.

On the other hand, it is not always appropriate to group all newcomers or all established residents together in the case of Emporia. When discussing new arrivals in Emporia, community members tended to compare and contrast the Somali newcomers and Hispanic newcomers. The term Hispanic has been adopted here since most interview respondents used this term including respondents who described themselves as Hispanic.

One major limitation of this study is that it includes only limited input from Somali newcomers. Since most of the Somali newcomers had already left Emporia by the time interviews were conducted, most respondents were community leaders who reflected on their experiences with the Somali newcomers. It is also important to mention that this study cannot claim to reflect the views of the “average Emporian” of the Somali newcomers. Most interview respondents were self-selected community leaders who chose to involve themselves in the effort to smooth the process of incorporating newcomers into the community. Individuals who chose to write the mostly negative comments about refugees in the online forum were also a self-selected group. It is quite possible that a large number of Emporians found themselves somewhere in between.

Chapter 3: Review of the Literature

New Immigration Destinations

The increasing geographic dispersion of immigrants to nonmetropolitan communities may be attributed in part to the overall growth in the immigrant population. Gozdziaik and Rice (2008) find that the foreign-born population in the United States has grown 86 percent between 1990 and 2005. They classify the fifty states in three categories: traditional, new settlement, and moderate growth states. The traditional immigrant-receiving states – California, New York, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey – are home to 66 percent of the country's foreign-born population. The new settlement states are those new destinations exhibiting extremely high rates of growth in the foreign-born population: over 100 percent in 15 years. The moderate growth states experienced less than 100 percent growth. Gozdziaik and Rice classify Kansas as a new settlement state; the foreign-born population in Kansas increased 160.4 percent between 1990 and 2005.

One factor that has affected the dispersion of the foreign-born population to these new destinations is the pull of economic opportunity. Industrial restructuring has been a major catalyst for the shift of migration flows to nonmetropolitan communities. Hirschman and Massey (2008) point to the fact that new settlement destinations tend to be communities that have plentiful jobs in low-skill services. As many industries have relocated to nonmetropolitan communities in rural areas, and

as many low-skill jobs no longer attract native-born workers, immigrants have been pulled to these new locations.

A prominent example is the meatpacking and processing industry. During the farm crisis in the 1980s, rural areas faced depressed economies and welcomed industries such as meat processing. The meat industry soon recognized the advantage in processing livestock closer to where it was raised (Stanley 1992; Griffith, Broadway and Stull 1995; Dalla and Baugher 2001). The industry grew fiercely competitive, and low-cost labor became a key element in gaining the competitive edge. Restructuring in the meat industry has meant not only decentralizing operations to nonmetropolitan and rural areas in the Midwest and South, but also deskilling operations, lowering wages, and recruiting non-union labor (Gozdziak 2005).

Most workers employed in the disassembly of meat or poultry in the Midwest are immigrants (Fennelly 2008). Immigrants have been attracted to the industry both through direct recruitment and through social networks or word-of-mouth. Besides offering low wages, meatpacking is considered the most dangerous job in the U.S. (Stanley 1992, Schlosser 2001).

Although the pay for meatpacking jobs is relatively high compared with other low-skilled work, the work is strenuous and the high likelihood of being injured leads to low job security and high turnover rates (Parrado and Kandel 2008). Workers on the “disassembly lines” continuously make repetitive motions, often with razor-sharp knives. The work often leads to carpal-tunnel syndrome among

other injuries (Stull and Broadway 1995). These factors contribute to the waning attractiveness of meatpacking jobs for native-born workers.

At the same time, the native-born population in many new immigration destinations had been in decline for years before the arrival of immigrant newcomers turned the trend around (Fennelly 2008). Donato et al. (2008) assess population growth in counties across the U.S., finding that 3.5 percent of the 1,695 nonmetropolitan counties and 4.1 percent of the 740 metropolitan counties that experienced population growth did so only because of immigrant newcomers. The authors refer to these counties whose populations are sustained by the foreign-born as “offset counties” (p. 79). They found that many of these offset counties are, like Emporia, KS in Lyon County, located along Interstate 35, which stretches from Texas to Minnesota, and is a major route for Mexico-U.S. migration.

The immigrant pioneers in the new immigration destinations tend to be Latino (Bump 2005). Rural communities experience social and economic upheaval as Latino immigrants are attracted to employment opportunities that require little English proficiency and no previous experience in the meatpacking industry. Whereas some of these communities may have experienced the temporary, circulatory migration of seasonal migrant workers in the past, few have a history of welcoming families for permanent settlement (Dalla and Baugher 2001).

Responses to new immigrant populations in new immigration destinations have spanned from accepting to xenophobic. Some community members in towns with declining populations may welcome the diversity and the breath of new life that

immigrants bring. Others may recognize the interactions with immigrants as mutually beneficial. According to Hirschman and Massey:

Immigrant workers fill economic niches that keep some industries in business; immigrants are willing to provide some low-cost services that might not otherwise be available; immigrants create economic demand for housing and local enterprises; and immigrant families also provide a clientele for schools, churches, and other organizations, many of which include natives (2008: 18).

Dalla and Baugher (2001) point out that with rapid demographic change natives report feeling frustrated with the changes they see in their communities and newcomers often face discrimination and racism. In addition, public and private services, including schools, housing, health and social service facilities, and law enforcement agencies may not be prepared to meet the needs of a large number of immigrant families (Dalla and Baugher 2001; Bump 2005). As the number of immigrant children in classrooms grows, they face a shortage of teachers who are able to communicate in any language other than English, while the parents of the native-born complain that the quality of education is being pulled down by the influx of immigrant students.

Immigrants are confronted with many challenges in the process of resettlement in any destination. However, immigration to new immigration destinations presents unique challenges and deserves focused attention. Douglas Massey (2008) refers to traditional destinations – the “gateway” cities – as “assimilation machines” (p. 351). These cities have a long history of receiving immigrants and therefore have policies and services in place to smooth the road to integration and advancement. This is not the case in new immigration destinations.

Another reason for focused attention on the responses to immigration in new immigration destinations is that attitudes toward immigrants may vary depending on place of residence. Fennelly and Federico (2008) compare the responses of urban, suburban, and rural residents in a survey about immigrants, finding more negative attitudes toward immigrants among rural residents:

A clear majority of rural residents (and significantly more than their urban or suburban counterparts) believe that there are too many immigrants in the United States, that immigration is bad for the country, that immigrants take jobs away from Americans, do not pay their fair share of taxes, and that they are a burden on the country because they take jobs, housing, and healthcare from other Americans. Rural residents are also much less likely than their urban or suburban counterparts to feel that immigrants have been the victims of unfair discrimination and are more likely to believe that the federal government is not tough enough on immigration (p. 166).

The authors find that the primary explanations for these differences are in attitudes and perceptions of immigration including, “support for a monocultural view of American culture, negative perceptions of immigrants themselves, and in particular, a strong perception that immigration is costly to the host society” (p. 166).

Gozdziak (2005) points to the need for systematic analysis of the responses that may await immigrants in new destination communities. Public policy approaches that have been developed in larger gateway cities with long immigration traditions may not translate to smaller nonmetropolitan or rural communities that have less experience with diversity and fewer resources to assist diverse populations. Communities are left to experiment, searching for a model that meets their needs.

Some communities in new immigration destinations have developed diversity committees that help to ameliorate the process of change and to connect immigrants

to needed services (Dalla and Baugher 2001). The authors point to the need for developing “best practices” for community responses since demographic change is expected to continue in rural communities.

A number of case studies have documented the responses of nonmetropolitan communities to new immigrants. All of these studies note the influence of local institutions in these migration stories. Gouveia and Stull (1997) conducted a case study of Lexington, Nebraska, where in 1990 Iowa Beef Processors (IBP) opened a meat processing plant that by 1997 employed 2,300 workers, 70 to 80 percent of whom were Latino. The authors report an increase in “civil society” organizations. Community members organized cultural diversity workshops, forums, and volunteer groups in advance of IBP’s arrival in 1990. In addition to these positive efforts, the authors suggest that the community needs to provide more opportunities for the newcomers themselves to take active roles as protagonists and not simply receivers of the community’s efforts to ease their transition into the community.

Another new immigration destination that has been the focus of scholarly attention is Garden City, a meatpacking town in Western Kansas. Katherine Acosta (2008) explores the relationship between religious participation and integration among Latino immigrants in Garden City and Syracuse, Kansas. Janet Benson (2001) studied how residents of Garden City, KS responded to the arrival of immigrant and refugee populations. She describes the planning of schools, churches, media, and service agencies as proactive, yet self-interested; while the city has made positive structural and cultural accommodations to ease the integration process,

recent immigrants remain highly segregated. More recently, Stull and Broadway report that Hispanic immigrants in Garden City are becoming more included in community interaction (2008).

Katherine Fennelly (2008) examines a town of about 20,000 in Minnesota that, like Emporia, experienced rapid growth of its foreign-born population in the 1990s as immigrants were attracted to the local meat processing industry. Fennelly refers to the town as “Devereux” to avoid using the town’s real name. The majority of the foreign born in Devereux were of Hispanic origin, but about 250 Somalis, 250 Nuer from Southern Sudan, and 400 Asians also lived and worked there.

To study the differing ways in which established residents responded to newcomers in their community, Fennelly organized focus groups of established residents in three categories: community leaders, middle class, and working class. She found that the participants she designated as community leaders were most likely to see newcomers positively, connecting immigration with economic growth. Middle class participants made some positive statements but expressed feeling threatened by change or feeling afraid of newcomers. Working class individuals tended to have the most interaction with newcomers, but expressed deeper prejudice and were more likely to see immigrants as a burden on society or as receiving unwarranted advantages.

Fennelly calls into question the idea that contact between established residents and newcomers will diminish prejudice between these groups. She points out that community leaders in Devereux, while retaining a positive attitude toward

immigrants, have little interaction with them. Working class residents, on the other hand, had a great deal of interaction but found themselves in competition for the same jobs and services. The amount of interaction between newcomers and established residents does not tell us everything about the possibility for conflict. Thus, the present study, while affirming the value of interaction between newcomers and established residents, takes into account the way interaction is structured in new immigration destinations.

Mediating Structures

Louise Lamphere (1992) has explored the ways in which new immigrants are incorporated into communities. The volume, *Structuring Diversity: Ethnographic Perspectives on the New Immigration*, brings together the work of research teams in five urban areas: Miami, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia and Houston, and one small Midwestern city: Garden City, Kansas. Lamphere focuses on the specific institutions through which newcomers and established residents begin to interact. These institutions, ranging from workplaces and schools to apartment complexes, are the link between individuals with needs and the impersonal structures of modern society. Macro-level political forces at work in a society, she suggests, may be observed at the micro-level within these mediating structures. These structures tend to be organized hierarchically, and class differences are perpetuated within them. Established residents tend to hold positions of power over newcomers. Lamphere points out that representations of relationships between newcomers and established

residents in the media tend to focus on instances of conflict, an approach that may mislead us into assuming that tension is inevitable when newcomers arrive. The research projects included in *Structuring Diversity* examine more closely the ways in which relationships between newcomers and established residents are structured in ways that either promote or diffuse tension. This study examines the role of mediating structures in the integration of newcomers in a new immigration destination.

These studies of mediating structures focus on structures and institutions that were in place before the arrival of the newcomers, such as schools, churches, workplaces, and medical clinics. The present study addresses the response to newcomers in Emporia in two types of these structures, focusing on schools and healthcare facilities. However, this project also examines an organization that was developed in response to the arrival of Somali newcomers in Emporia, KS. This organization was intended to provide a structure for formal interaction between newcomers and established residents. This follows the work of Micah Bump (2005) who analyzes the community of Winchester, Virginia, where the population had been largely Caucasian and African American until the mid 1990s, when Hispanic migrants began settling permanently. Bump applies Lamphere's concept of mediating structures to a local advocacy group, the Latino Connection. The Latino Connection, in bringing together newcomers and individuals knowledgeable of the needs of the newcomer community, functioned as a mediating structure, establishing a dialogue between the newcomers and service providers and advocating for the

needs of immigrants. The Emporia Refugee Resettlement Alliance (ERRA), like the Latino Connection, was also formed to facilitate dialogue between refugees and service providers. Representatives of traditional mediating structures such as schools and the health community came together in the ERRA. However, part of ERRA's mission was also to provide cross-cultural awareness, encouraging refugees to learn about the established residents' culture, and encouraging established residents to learn more about the Somalis. The ERRA also interacted with the media, attempting to confront negative perceptions of Somali newcomers in the public discourse.

This study also differs from most studies of mediating structures in community integration in that it focuses primarily on the receiving community's response to Somali refugees. Few studies have examined the experience of African refugees in new immigration destinations. Jon Holtzman (2008) studies the resettlement of Nuer Sudanese refugees in Minnesota. Holtzman proposes that the wide variation of experiences of Nuer refugees in their interactions with American communities can be accounted for in part by the role of mediating institutions. Like the Somali refugees who appeared in Emporia, the Nuer in Minnesota retained strong ties with each other, while remaining relatively isolated from Americans. Thus Holtzman stresses the importance of formal contexts of interaction. Contact with case workers, social workers, healthcare providers, and landlords provided the first close interactions between the Nuer refugees and the wider community.

While there are many similarities between the barriers faced by Somali and Nuer refugees, one notable difference is that the Nuer practice Christianity while

Somali refugees tend to be Muslim. For the Christian Nuer, churches in Minnesota provided at least some sense of continuity between their lives in Sudan and life in the U.S, and also facilitated positive interactions between the Nuer newcomers and established residents who shared time with them in church. For the Somali refugees in Emporia, on the other hand, their Muslim faith tended to isolate them from most other community members.

One unique aspect of this study is that it draws comparisons between the experiences of the Somali newcomers and the Hispanic community in Emporia. Since many new Hispanic immigrants (as opposed to longer-established Hispanic community members) were attracted to Emporia by work in the meat industry, they may be categorized in the same socio-economic class as the Somali newcomers. On the other hand, differences in race or ethnicity, religion, and language set the Somalis apart in the minds of many established residents. The Somalis' refugee status also distinguished their experience with integration from that of many other immigrant groups.

This study follows the short-lived story of the Somali refugees in Emporia, highlighting the major barriers that community leaders and organizations like the ERRRA faced in attempting to “bridge the gap,” as well as initiatives that were seen as successful in improving understanding and acceptance among newcomers and established residents. Considering the importance of the media in this story of incorporating newcomers in Emporia, this thesis concludes by raising the possibility that the media could be improved as a mediating structure.

Chapter 4: Somali Newcomers in New Immigration

Destinations

Most studies of immigration to nonmetropolitan areas in the U.S. focus on immigration from Mexico and Latin America, reflecting the reality that Hispanic immigrants tend to be the first to settle in these new areas and far outnumber other groups. Fewer studies have given attention to the growing presence of Africans in some of these new destinations. Africans have immigrated to the United States for a variety of reasons, but this study will focus on immigrants with refugee status.

The growing number of African refugees in the United States reflects a shift in U.S. refugee resettlement policies since 1980. Following the Refugee Act of 1980, refugee status was no longer reserved for individuals fleeing communist countries or the Middle East. After the Cold War, it was necessary for the refugee program to shift its focus from individuals escaping communist regimes. In the mid-1990s, the State Department began to search for large groups with valid persecution claims. This effort has led to the resettlement of large groups such as the “Lost Boys” of Sudan and the Somali Bantu. Whereas the annual allocation for African refugee resettlement to the U.S. was 1,500 in 1980, the allocation had risen to 22,000 by 2007 (Boas 2007).

There has been limited scholarly interest in the resettlement of Somali refugees in new immigrant-receiving communities. Bailey (2005) mentions a

community of Somali refugees of the Benadir tribe in Greensboro, North Carolina in

1994. Regarding the reception of that community in Greensboro, she writes:

These devout Muslims with strict codes of conduct caused some ripples in the workplace and schools, and clashed with some of their church sponsors. Issues that needed peaceful resolution included requests for school and work-site prayer rooms and dress code changes to accommodate hijab (p. 64).

Resettlement agencies, community advocates, and the Somali community persevered in settling these and other cultural conflicts, and the Somali population in Greensboro stabilized at a few hundred.

Additional evidence of Somali communities forming in many new destinations may be found in local newspapers. From their initial resettlement points, refugees have continued to move to other towns. In some cases, large groups of Somali refugees have moved to nonmetropolitan areas to take up positions in meatpacking plants. Journalists have reported both positive stories and indications of tensions between Somali refugees and established residents. An article appeared in the *Kansas City Star* on May 19, 2008 titled “Are Immigration Raids Really Doing What Backers Claim?” (Sanchez). In the article Mary Sanchez writes about the 2006 raid in which Swift Co. meatpacking operations in six states were raided and over 1,200 immigrants arrested. One of the plants targeted in the raid was in Greeley, Colorado. Sanchez’s take on the situation in Greeley is as follows:

People in Greeley say many of the illegal immigrants have simply returned or been replaced by newer, also illegal workers. Others report that the raid created an anti-Latino mood, causing some legally resident Latinos to leave town, lest they be targeted, too.

And there is a new influx to Greeley: hundreds of Somali refugees, who are legally allowed to live and work in the United States. The same situation is playing out in Grand Island, Neb., also the scene of a 2006 Swift raid. Hundreds of Somalis, many from Minnesota, are arriving to take the jobs once held by the Latino immigrants. But officials there also do not believe the illegal or legal Latino population has changed much.

Journalists have acknowledged the same phenomenon in Nebraska. An October 29, 2007 article in the *Lincoln Journal-Star* reported that Somali refugees like Omar Abib came to Lexington, a town of 10,250 because of the low cost of small town living, the availability of meatpacking jobs, and the presence of other Somalis. He heard about Lexington by word of mouth, through other Somalis. Nate Jenkins (2007) reported:

The word-of-mouth advertising about Nebraska that is passed among refugees in distant U.S. cities gained steam late last year after U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials raided Swift & Co. meatpacking plants in six states, including the one in Grand Island. It resulted in 1,200 arrests at the plants in December.

A February 6, 2008 *Lexington Clipper-Herald* article titled, "The Changing Face of Lex," quotes a chaplain at Tyson Fresh Meats who attempts to explain why Somali refugees may be attracted to meatpacking jobs. His remark is an indication of the prejudice facing Somalis in the workforce. The chaplain, Victor Diaz told the newspaper, "If a Hispanic loses their job, they can easily get another. Who else hires a Somali?" In the article, Danny Gruber reports that many of the refugees have been living in refugee camps and lack employment histories, or the skill level needed for many jobs. Meatpacking, he says, is easy to attain, pays relatively well, and is the reason that many refugees were attracted to Lexington. At the time of the article, 500 shifts still needed to be filled at the Lexington plant, and only 100 workers from the

closing Emporia, Kansas plant were expected to take these positions, leading Diaz to predict that more immigrants would be arriving in Lexington (Gruber 2008).

A 2001 *New York Times* story titled, “Tennessee Town Loses Allure for Immigrants,” describes Shelbyville, Tennessee, a community of 16,000, 60 miles south of Nashville, as a town that was once a haven for immigrants, who could easily find work at the local chicken processing plant. Workers reported being hired without papers or with counterfeit social security cards. According to census data, the Hispanic population had grown from 92 in 1990 to 2,343 a decade later. In 2001, Tyson and six individual managers were indicted for smuggling undocumented individuals and aiding them in acquiring counterfeit documents. The indictment led to a crackdown on undocumented workers and the town saw many immigrants from Mexico and Guatemala leaving the area (Kershaw 2001). In 2003, Tyson and three of the managers were acquitted. Tyson’s defense asserted Tyson’s commitment to legal hiring practices (Day 2003).

Somali refugees flowed into Shelbyville. In December 2007, Brian Mosley, a reporter for the *Shelbyville Times-Gazette*, began a series of articles on the growing Somali refugee community in Shelbyville. According to one article, Holly Johnson, director of Catholic Charities of Nashville, estimated that most, perhaps even all of the employed Somalis were working in the Tyson chicken processing plant (2007a).

The articles indicate an unwelcoming attitude toward the Somali newcomers. In a February 2, 2008 article, “Opinion: Somalians Respond Poorly to Local Hospitality,” Mosley was openly resentful toward the Somalis. “Over the past few

years,” Mosley wrote, “this community has given a helping hand and opened their arms to the new arrivals from Somalia. In return, many of these refugees have given Shelbyville the finger.” According to Mosley, the refugees had responded to the community’s welcome with “rudeness, disrespect and hostility.” Mosley asserted that those who protested the presence of the new arrivals were not racist. To support his point that community members’ misgivings regarding the refugees had nothing to do with skin color, he pointed out that the Somali newcomers are “hundreds of years behind the times in the ways of hygiene, mannerisms, culture, and the treatment of women” (2007c).

On December 28, 2007, the *Shelbyville Times-Gazette* published another of Mosley’s articles, “Adjustment is Rougher for Some Cities.” Mosley points out examples of other cities, including Emporia, Kansas, that have received large numbers of Somalis and claims that they are having a more difficult time than Shelbyville:

Shelbyville is just one of several cities across the country which have found themselves with new neighbors from a culture as different from theirs as night and day.

But as one examines how other communities have reacted to large numbers of Somali refugees moving in, it is obvious that Shelbyville has adjusted far better than other towns and cities in America.

While many of the VOLAGs (volunteer agencies) like Catholic Charities and other organizations involved in refugee resettlement promote diversity and opening communities up to different cultures, there also have been concerns about the process(...)

But while Shelbyville has more or less welcomed the Somalis, not every community have (sic) accepted these newcomers with open arms.

In Emporia, Kansas, where about 400 refugees work at the Tyson Foods meat processing plant, many citizens are talking about the sudden influx. An estimated 750 to 1,000 Somali refugees are currently living in Emporia, according to locally published reports.

During a recent town hall meeting attended by hundreds, residents in the small Kansas town expressed concern about many issues, including the spread of tuberculosis, due to the fact that 160 of the refugees have latent TB, meaning it is in their system but not active or contagious (Mosley 2007b).

These accounts provide an indication of the attitudes that refugees may encounter in the resettlement process in small communities. Resettlement experiences vary depending on both the individual and the environment. Although the United States refugee resettlement program now attempts to disperse large groups of refugees across the United States to prevent them from clustering in a single location, refugees have tended to be quite mobile after arrival in their designated cities. They have the right to move around the United States, and many tend to cluster with other members of their own ethnic group (Holtzman 2008). Large communities of Somali refugees are concentrated in Minnesota, but groups have also moved to other destinations in search of employment opportunities. Clustering in large numbers, they are likely to have quite an impact, especially when the destination of choice is a small town. The next portion of this study focuses on one such destination of secondary migration: Emporia, Kansas.

Chapter 5: Perceptions of Newcomers in Emporia

Emporia, KS is a city of about 26,760 (United States Census Bureau 2000) located on Interstate 35 between Kansas City and Wichita. Emporia is considered a “new immigration destination” here in the sense that it lies outside the traditional immigrant receiving gateways. Yet it would be misleading to characterize the town as a site that has never experienced diversity. Emporia has a long history of immigration from Latin America. However, the immigrant population has grown very rapidly over the past two decades. The following section provides some background on Emporia’s experience with receiving newcomers prior to the arrival of the Somali refugees.

The Iowa Beef Processors (IBP) meatpacking plant and a few other large employers triggered the rapid growth of the Hispanic community in Emporia in the 1990s. The population of Lyon County, where Emporia is located, grew by 1,203 in the 1990s, even though the native-born population had fallen by 816 (Mathis 2003). The population growth was fueled by the foreign-born. According to the U.S. census data, Emporia’s population in the year 2000 was 78.6 percent white, 21.5 percent Hispanic or Latino, 3.0 percent black or African American, 2.7 percent Asian, 0.5 percent American Indian and Alaskan Native, 12.7 percent reported another race and 2.5 percent reported two or more races (United States Census Bureau 2000). Some in Emporia take issue with the census numbers, however. According to a May 2006 article in the *Lawrence Journal-World*:

Many people believe the Census undercounted, perhaps because illegal immigrants were avoiding the numbers-takers. They point to school district enrollment as proof; 43 percent of Emporia public school students are Hispanic this year, up from 7.7 percent in 1989.

“If you look at the Census numbers and the school district, there’s a disparity,” said Chief Heffron, who formerly served on the Emporia School Board. “The school district is accurate. The Census obviously is not” (Mathis 2006a).

The rapid growth of the foreign born population in Emporia has ensured that the national debate over immigration is on the minds of local residents. On May 1, 2006, as immigration rallies were taking place nation-wide, a crowd of about 1,500 pro-immigration protesters marched through Emporia. At the same time, a counter-protest of about 75 people organized, as immigration opponents held signs reading, for example, “Deport all illegal immigrants,” or “One flag, one language, no amnesty” (*Lawrence Journal-World*, 2006).

Lyon County Newcomers

In 1980, Minnie M. Miller, a professor emerita at Emporia State University, authored “The Mexican Heritage of Lyon County.” This historical essay appeared in four installments in the *Emporia Gazette* and was later published separately in book form. According to Miller, the first Mexican family in Emporia was the family of Anastasio Valdez, a Santa Fe Railroad worker. His family came from Michoachan in 1905. Many other families arrived between 1905 and 1929, when the Depression brought this wave of immigration to a halt. Many of the men had been working in the area for years and their families were finally joining them. “Almost all the early Mexicans worked on section gangs for the Santa Fe railroad,” Miller writes. “A large

group came around 1918 when Mexico was still troubled by civil war and when the United States, because of World War I, needed more laborers” (p. 3). By the end of this first “influx” in 1929, Miller reports that there were 1,200 Mexicans or Mexican-Americans in Lyon County (p. 3).

Miller goes on to describe Lyon County Mexicans and Mexican-Americans who stayed in the area through the Depression years. Around 60 of the young men served in World War II, while Mexicans and Mexican-Americans faced discrimination and segregation in Emporia:

Jose Garcia felt terribly hurt that his son Jesse had been refused service in an Emporia restaurant shortly before he left to die for his country. The father wrote a letter of protest to Washington, but was informed that discrimination was a matter of local option. Although, after 1953, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were no longer required to sit in a special place in the balcony at a movie theater, they could not be sure, until the Civil Rights Bill had been passed in 1964, that they would be served in Emporia restaurants, barber shops, and beauty salons (...) It is fortunate that Jose Garcia lived long enough to see discrimination become illegal (Miller 1980, p. 6).

The next wave of immigration, according to Miller, came with the opening of the Iowa Beef Processors (IBP) plant in 1969:

On May 15, 1969, Iowa Beef Processors slaughtered its first cattle. As more and more animals came in, a severe labor shortage developed. From November 1969 to the end of 1970, Tony Tabares and one of the supervisors made 6 trips to Texas, especially to San Antonio and Laredo. Radio and television announced job opportunities...(Miller 1980, p. 7).

People in Emporia referred to this new wave as the “Texans,” and according to Miller’s account, they sometimes came into conflict with established residents who considered themselves Mexican-Americans:

Ignacio Herrera(...) responded to one of the earlier calls by Iowa Beef(...) The Herreras belong to the group called the Texans or “Texans.” Formerly, there was some open dissension between the Texans and the earlier Mexican-Americans of Emporia.

The Texans still do not find the earlier group very friendly. They hope Las Casitas Park will bring everyone together (Miller 1980, p. 7).

Some tension between newcomers and established residents, then, is not new to Emporia, and much of the rapid growth in the foreign-born population took place even after this account was written. Emporia has seen a boom in the local Hispanic population as well as the arrival of smaller refugee populations including Southeast Asians. The following section will explore the ways in which community leaders in Emporia reflect on the town's immigration history, and how they put the arrival of the Somali newcomers into perspective based on this history.

Respondents' Perceptions of Newcomers

Almost thirty years after Minnie Miller's account was written, divisions between newcomers and established residents remain. The Hispanic community has a major presence in Emporia. This includes newcomers from various parts of Central and South America as well as descendents of those who immigrated generations ago. In early interviews, respondents reflected upon Emporia's diverse population. Respondents were aware of Emporia's unique history of receiving immigrants and often brought up the idea that immigrants had arrived in Emporia in "waves." Their comments on perceptions of immigration in general seemed to shed some light on the differing ways that Emporians responded to the Somali newcomers. Thus, respondents in later interviews were asked to reflect on Emporia's history of receiving newcomers. Many respondents commented that there were divisions in Emporia long before the Somalis arrived. They did not characterize these divisions in simple terms of Hispanic vs. White or immigrants vs. native-born, however. The picture they painted was more complex. Respondents mentioned tensions between established residents and newcomers in general, as well as the ways that established residents responded to the Somali newcomers as outsiders because of differences in race, religion, culture and language. At the same time, some respondents felt that established residents should have responded to the Somali newcomers more positively because they immigrated "legally".

Several respondents reflected that with every “wave” of immigration, newcomers tended to be marginalized. Thus, the Hispanic “community” was rarely described as a cohesive group. Some respondents referred to divisions between established residents and newcomers. As an adult ESL instructor explained:

I always tell my students that Emporia was settled in different waves. First you had the whites – the Swedish, Irish, German whites. And then in the early 1900s the Mexicans came here (...) then they became established. This was the first Hispanic group in Emporia. Then in the 60s we had another wave of the new Mexican immigrants. And then the Vietnamese. Then the Salvadorans. (...) Then we had the Somalis. So Emporia has adjusted. Readjust. Readjust. Readjust. But there always – between the Hispanics that have been here, the Mexican Americans and the new immigrants – there was a distinction: “Oh I am not an immigrant, I’m a Mexican American” (Interview May 27, 2008).

A university professor also noted this division between long-established Hispanic residents and new immigrants:

I think that what the Somali population did was kind of just deflect attention away from that division between the longer term multi-generation Hispanics who have been here... I mean they came here even before the turn of the century. There were some who came and worked on ranches and worked on the railroads when they went through way back in the 19th Century. There were some who were here many generations. And then there was a new wave when the Mexican Revolution happened. People were fleeing from Mexico and coming up here and got ranch jobs and railroad jobs or whatever so there was another wave... There was kind of this building tension between the longer-term residents and the newer residents maybe 5 or 6 years ago. And then the attention was really deflected from that by the arrival of the Somalis... so I don’t think that tension has gone away (...) the tension between the Somali community was just so much more obvious because they’re just such a visible minority (Interview July 3, 2008).

A city official also characterized conflict in Emporia in terms of old vs. new:

If you look back at what happened, what’s happening in Emporia is that we had the already established Hispanic families. Then they started bringing in people to work at IBP that were either newly from – we had some come in from Vietnam that were refugees. We had a lot of them come in from Mexico or from South and Central America (...) and there was a lot of friction when that happened, at that time. Probably the group that was hardest to get through was that the established

Hispanics did not like being lumped in with the newly arriving Hispanics (Interview May 29, 2008).

Although several respondents pointed out tensions between newcomers and established residents, exceptions to this attitude do exist. In 2006, the *Lawrence Journal-World* painted relations between longer term Hispanics and recent immigrants in a more positive light. One man whose story was highlighted in the article recalled his grandfather encouraging his children to assimilate:

Gil Solis came to the United States from Mexico in 1910, settling in this city's "La Colonia" neighborhood with other immigrants who worked on the railroad. For the most part, his grandson said, Gil demanded that his kids and grandkids assimilate in the new country. "My grandpa said, 'You're in America, you've got to be American,'" said Phil Solis, 65, a third-generation Emporia resident. Even though his connections to Mexico are long in the family's past, Phil Solis attended Monday's "A Day Without Immigrants" rally at the Lyon County Fairgrounds, joining hundreds of more recent arrivals to America in protesting against proposed new restrictions. "I love them," Solis said of the immigrants (Mathis 2006b).

In addition to divisions among successive waves of newcomers, some respondents also referred to divisions among newcomers based on place of origin or cultural differences. They pointed out that immigrants came from diverse backgrounds and could not be lumped together as an immigrant "community." One respondent, a Hispanic leader of a community organization, talked about these divisions, comparing Emporians of Hispanic origin to the Somali newcomers:

Even within our (Hispanic) culture, we're all segmented. There is like a clique of Ecuadorians, there's a clique of Michoachan, Mexico, (of) Salvadorians, and see even us (we) struggle to connect. And that's one thing the Somalis didn't have in their culture. They are Somali and they are Muslim and they stick together no matter what – for good or for bad (Interview May, 23, 2008).

In some people's minds, then, the Somalis were arriving in a community that was already struggling with cohesion. A school teacher talked about separation between the White, Hispanic, and Somali communities, calling Emporia "fractured":

Our community is so fractured, it seemed like, you know, because definitely there are some old divisions there (...) It's not necessarily a very transient white population so it's a lot of people that have been in the area for a long, long time, and then you have the migrant Hispanic population which was a big fracture (...) And then you know you brought in the Somalis and there was maybe even a bigger fracture between the Hispanic community and the Somalian community, not to mention the white community fracture, you know. So, there's all of these different camps, I guess. Definitely it was a scary situation, a powder keg (Interview May 27, 2008).

Other respondents felt that negative reactions to the Somali newcomers were not at all surprising, looking back on successive waves of immigration and pointing out that every wave of newcomers had been marginalized. Many respondents compared the arrival of the Somali refugees to earlier newcomers, some reaching as far back in history as the arrival of early European immigrants:

AS: So do you think there was a lot of that prejudice in Emporia before the Somalis arrived?

Ya.

AS: Did it come out as much?

Ya. It depends on which era... I always thought ERRA was a great name because we have had so many eras. Back in the mid-70s – Wolf Creek was being built – we had a lot of Arabic people in town. They called them camel jockeys and all kinds of horrible names, and they hated them (...) And then the next wave would have been in the mid-80s we had Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians come. And yes it was just as directed. And with each wave of population that comes, the old populations gain a little bit of status while the new populations get hammered. That's just the way it is. I mean, the Irish, which I am, were hated back in New York when we arrived (Interview May 29, 2008).

Some respondents, although they felt that newcomers to Emporia tended to be marginalized, felt that the situation was improving for Hispanic newcomers, but that the Somalis faced a stronger negative reaction. One respondent felt that people of Hispanic origin had faced discrimination when they arrived in the 1970s, but that the situation had improved for more recent arrivals, until the Somalis came:

AS: Did the negative reactions (to the Somalis) surprise you?

No I was not surprised. I'm not from Emporia. I'm originally from Texas and when I moved from Texas here my dad was employed at – at that time it was Iowa Beef Processors. We moved here and back then in the mid-70's, the Hispanic community – population – was very, very small (...) and then coming myself from Texas from a predominantly Hispanic population to come to the opposite was very different for me. That's why I say I wasn't surprised because I know when I first moved here, just because I was of a Hispanic descent, they automatically – people here think, "Oh, you're from Mexico." Well, I'm not from Mexico. I wasn't born in Mexico. I said maybe my ancestors way back when, you know. So that's why I wasn't surprised they were in the negative. I'm not going to say I went through like what the Somalis did but I had a little taste of it.

AS: So there was some separation in town before the Somalis arrived?

Way, way before the Somalis arrived. It started changing (...) I'm going to say maybe in the late 80s, early 90s is when the Hispanic population started growing, and then it just boomed by the mid-nineties.

AS: So those that arrived later- do you think it was easier for them here?

Yes. Oh yes. Easier than when I arrived way back in the mid-70s.

AS: So they've started to be more easily accepted?

Mmm-hmm

AS: But the Somalis were different?

Ya.

AS: Why do you think that is?

I don't know. I really don't know...Maybe because people didn't understand...
(Interview May 29, 2008).

Other respondents went further in explaining why the Somali refugees faced such a strong backlash from some established residents. Many of their comments centered on the idea that Somalis were simply “so different” from other Emporians. Some pointed out that, although the Hispanic population had exposed the people of Emporia to differences in culture and language, the Somali population was completely unfamiliar to Emporians. Some respondents pointed out that the Somalis’ language, culture, and religion were unfamiliar to most Emporians. According to a city official:

We discussed, this is a population that is new to our community (...) First of all the language was very difficult (...) Our Hispanic population has really grown, but when they came here, there were people here who were already familiar with their language. There were people already familiar with their religion. We’ve had Hispanics who came here when the railroad was built so some have been here, you know, for close to a hundred years now- their families have. So we already had been exposed to some of that culture before. But when the Somalis came in, we had no language, their cultural behavior was way different from ours, we were not familiar with their religion, most of us, you know. And the timing with it being the war in Iraq and everything – anyone that was a Muslim, people were concerned about (...) So that religion thing was a big difference. We had to educate ourselves about what a tribal community is and how that works because that’s very alien to what we’ve been experienced with before...(Interview May 29, 2008).

Other respondents agreed, pointing out that the Somalis were a visible minority. Not only their language, culture, and religion, but also their appearance and style of dress set them apart. One public health professional emphasized that, being “so different,” the Somali refugee population stood out in the community. This respondent’s comments centered on ethnicity, culture, religion, and skin color:

I just don't think it's easy for any community to have an influx of several hundred people who are racially and ethnically and culturally and religiously so different from the majority of the community (...)

And Emporia has diversity in that we have a fairly large Hispanic population- maybe about 20-22 percent of the community. Our African American population though is only 3-4 percent of our total population, smaller than that for Southeast Asians. So really we like to think we're a diverse cosmopolitan little college town, but we're not as diverse as many metropolitan areas. And 600 or so people from Somalia arriving in a community- you notice it. Because the women were wearing their traditional dress to adhere to their religious traditions. Their body stature and facial features are... you know their skin color is similar to African Americans but it was just – they're Africans – it was clear. They stood out from the rest of the community and I think that will be a challenge wherever they go where it's smaller population centers (Interview May 28, 2008).

These differences were difficult for some Emporians to accept. A university professor agreed: “they were so different from the Emporia community- being Muslim, dressing differently, being Black Africans” (Interview July 3, 2008).

A state government official, in discussing the need for the Emporia Refugee Resettlement Alliance, returned to these themes of race, language, and religion:

That precipitated bringing the alliance together to start addressing – how do we address rumors, how do we get information out to both the Somali community about what they need to know to be able to survive and function in Emporia as well to the community at large about who these strangers were in their community because we're talking about middle America Bible Belt, small town USA that – while they've had exposure to the Hispanic community for years, because of the railroad and then ultimately Tyson – those had become accepted faces in the community. This was an entirely different group that; A, was dark complected; B, didn't speak English; C, was of a faith that, you know, all they knew was what they'd seen on TV. So our objective was to put out factual information that would help both sides understand the other and encourage tolerance and patience (Interview June 18, 2008).

Many respondents agreed that there was a great deal of fear in the community, and that this fear was based on lack of understanding. When asked about what they knew about Somalia or their perceptions of Somalia before the Somali newcomers had arrived, several mentioned that their previous knowledge of Somalia

had been based on what they had seen on television or film. Several interview respondents mentioned having seen the film *Black Hawk Down*². Those who had seen the film remembered the depictions of Americans meeting their deaths at the hands of Somalis. Some respondents felt that this image of Somalis lent to the sense of fear among community members. According to a city official:

Before this happened I knew very little about Somalia. I probably could have found it on the map, but that's about it. It's a group that I learned a great deal from. Just taking the time to read books and view some videos. The one movie that most people were familiar with was *Black Hawk Down* – where the Somalis were the bad guys in the movie. So I watched that- which I probably would have never watched otherwise. To see that, well if people are coming at it from that attitude, no wonder we're having a problem (Interview May 29, 2008).

The perceptions of the Somali newcomers mentioned above reinforced barriers between established residents who feared or mistrusted the newcomers based on these media images.

On the other hand, some respondents also made distinctions between the Somalis and other newcomers that showed favor for the Somalis based on their status as refugees. One distinction that some Emporians made between the Somalis and Hispanic immigrants was that the Somalis were “legal.” According to a health professional:

² The 2001 film *Black Hawk Down*, directed by Ridley Scott is based on the novel *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* by Mark Bowden (1999). The film and book are drawn from actual events in 1993 when 18 US Army Rangers died in battle during a mission to capture lieutenants of the Somali warlord Muhammad Farrah Aidid. In a 2001 review of the film for *The New York Times*, Elvis Mitchell had this to say about the film's depiction of Somalis: “In “Black Hawk Down,” the lack of characterization converts the Somalis into a pack of snarling dark-skinned beasts, gleefully pulling the Americans from their downed aircraft and stripping them. Intended or not, it reeks of glumly staged racism.”

There was already a fairly large Hispanic population in Emporia (in the early 80s). Some of them worked at the railroad for years. Some of them worked at Tyson but some of them were second or third generation. Then we had an increase in the Hispanic population a lot coming initially with Tyson and then staying or coming for other family and staying. And one of the negative impacts had been illegal immigration. That was one of the things we had to learn ourselves and then had to help the community learn was the Somalis are not here illegally. They are here legally. You know if they have issues with them being here they shouldn't take them out with the Somalis. They should talk with the government officials who make the policies that bring them here. But the Somalis were here legally. We have struggled sometimes with the illegal population – in resources, providing medical care, again language barriers are a large issue, some of the issues with the school systems... (Interview May 21, 2008).

These comments reveal some conflicting trends in community leaders' attitudes toward the Somali refugees. On one hand, many community leaders saw the arrival of the Somalis as just another "wave" in a long history of receiving newcomers who would inevitably face resentment from established residents. On the other hand, many Emporians also felt that the wave of Somalis was different from earlier arrivals, pointing out what they saw as stark differences in race, language, religion, and culture. While these differences made the Somalis more difficult to accept as members of the community for some, others emphasized that the Somalis were refugees, not immigrants. They saw this as a difference that made the Somalis worthy of welcome and assistance. Some pointed to the fact that the Somalis were "legal," hinting that with the earlier waves of Hispanic immigration, one could not be sure whether the newcomers were legal or not.

Chapter 6: Challenges to Incorporation of Newcomers in Emporia

In February 2006, a Tyson Fresh Meats plant in Norfolk, Nebraska closed down, terminating 1,300 jobs (Hooper 2008). The Tyson plant in Emporia, Kansas then offered transfers to some of the laid-off workers from Norfolk. By March, according to the *Emporia Gazette*, about 80 Somali refugees had transferred from the Norfolk plant to work in Emporia. This number grew gradually over the course of 2006. By June, Tyson had hired 200 Somali workers, and by the end of the year, the number had grown to 400 (Rochat 2006).

There was no official census of the refugee population, and the numbers that were reported in the newspapers were estimates. It was known that around 400 Somalis were employed at Tyson, and some of the higher estimates of the total population (750 to 1,000) were based on the assumption that these employees had families with them. ERRA members who worked with the Somalis, however, found that many of the Somalis in Emporia were young, single individuals or they had children but left them with family members in other states such as Minnesota or Ohio. The Regional Refugee Coordinator for SRS, a Somali individual, estimated that the total number was probably closer to 500 or 550. He pointed out that the Somalis preferred not to move large families. Many of them, he said, would visit their out-of-state families on weekends and send money home when they were able (Interview May 28, 2008). Interview respondents also say that the refugee population

in Emporia was very mobile. Health professionals who worked with the Somali population say that it was like Emporia had a “revolving door”: Somali newcomers were frequently arriving as others moved on or returned to other states where they had family (Interview May 28, 2008).

Why did the Somalis choose Emporia? When asked this question, interview respondents overwhelmingly replied, “jobs.” The Director of Refugee Resettlement for Catholic Charities based in Kansas City, in an interview with the *Emporia Gazette*, compared the wages offered at Tyson in Emporia with wages in Kansas City metropolitan area, a site with much more experience of refugee resettlement (parenthetical information added by reporter is part of the original article):

“Tyson’s in Emporia starts people at \$11.35 an hour ... at least that’s what I conclude from interviewing these Somalis,” Weitkamp said. “I have not heard that from Tyson’s.”

(An advertisement by Tyson late last week announced that the company has increased its starting rate on all jobs, with entry wages ranging from \$11.65 an hour for processing, \$11.75 for slaughter; \$12.30 for maintenance; and \$17.75 for mechanics and qualified refrigeration mechanics.)

“That (hourly wage) is about 150 percent of what we find jobs for people around here (in the metro area). ... The fact is that there are industries that are based in the smaller towns like Garden City and Emporia and Liberal and Dodge that pay better” (Mlynar 2007i).

Somali Newcomers in the Media

The story of the Somali refugees in Emporia cannot be told without mention of the rumors that spread through town about the newcomers. Reporter Scot Rochat looked back on 2006 in a December 30, 2006 *Emporia Gazette* article, “An Eventful

Year.” Characterizing the community’s experience with receiving the Somali

refugees, he wrote:

Both newcomers and natives found they had some adjusting to do. Rumors flew about the new arrivals, including a claim that tuberculosis was rampant among the refugees. The Lyon County Health Department deflated that rumor saying the workers actually had latent TB, a non-contagious germ that could potentially cause the disease but does not carry the disease. If healthy, a person could carry the germ for a lifetime without noticing it. Late in the year, a group of Emporians founded the Emporia Refugee Resettlement Alliance to help everyone acclimate to the new situation.

The tuberculosis rumor was only one of the claims made about the Somalis and it at least had some basis in reality. The Somali refugees did exhibit disproportionately high rates of TB infection compared to Lyon County residents. Public health professionals worked to spread the word that the disease was latent and therefore not infectious in the vast majority of cases.

Other rumors had no basis in reality. Rumors of women being raped by Somali men spread quickly through town. On October 6, 2006, the *Emporia Gazette* ran an article with the headline, “No Evidence to Support E-Mail Allegations.” The article indicated that two different rape rumors were being spread through Emporia and the surrounding area via e-mail:

The emails make two separate allegations.

The first describes an incident wherein several Somalian workers forced a female co-worker into a closet and raped her at the Tyson plant here.

The second alleges that a group of Somalians converged on a woman at a car wash on East 12th Avenue. She was alleged to have escaped by getting back to her car and driving away (Mlynar 2006b).

The article went on to say that no such incidents had been reported to the police. By the time some people received the email it had grown; people had added their own commentary before forwarding the stories, and people were also alleging that Somali men were roaming the campus of Emporia State University raping female students. The emails caught the attention of a number of Emporians. Some community members were alarmed at the pervasiveness of these baseless accusations. A communications officer at the university was alarmed by the rumors pertaining to the campus and forwarded the message to some ESU faculty members, asking them to please combat the rumors and spread factual information (Interview with ESU professor, July 3, 2008).

Another *Gazette* article published in December 2006 titled “Meeting Brings Out Issues with Refugees” indicates a few more of the “fears” that Emporians were discussing. The chairperson of the Human Relations Commission shared what she had been hearing from other community members:

“They feel like this is something that is being foisted off on them in the community,” Gilligan said. “There’s also a great deal of fear in the community.” People who normally would not talk to her in politically incorrect terms are doing so now, she said. She mentioned several issues and fears that are being discussed around the city in conjunction with the refugees. Language is a major barrier, she said, and because of ongoing terrorism around the world, people are fearful of the Muslim refugees. Business owners have told her they hear that people are avoiding shopping in Emporia because of the new population and that will affect their livelihoods. Somali men tend to gather in sizable groups for socialization; in Emporia, any group “hanging out” would be suspect, she said (Mlynar 2006c).

The most common “hangout” for Somali men was the Ayan Café, a Somali restaurant opened by a Somali entrepreneur soon after the Somalis began arriving in Emporia. Many of the Somalis lived in an apartment building across the street from

the café. Not the typical American fast food joint, the Somali customers did not simply take their food and go. Many men would stay to socialize or watch television. Somali women did not eat at the café although some cooked there or came in for carry-out meals.

ERRA minutes indicate that the Ayan Café was at times targeted by vandals. People would also at times drive by yelling racial slurs. According to the *Emporia Gazette*, the café was also the target of an attempted armed robbery on January 9, 2007. Three men entered the café early in the morning wearing ski masks and carrying rifles. One of the robbers allegedly struck two Somali men with a rifle and demanded money. The two Somali men wrestled the gun from the young man and held him until police arrived, while his two accomplices escaped (Mlynar 2007a).

This was among the most extreme incidents at the café. Some established residents were curious and stopped by to eat. Helen Judd, an 86-year-old resident of a nearby town, made frequent visits to the café and wrote a letter to the *Gazette* about how much she enjoyed the food and the people there.

I have eaten there about a dozen times and so far I am the only lady I have seen sit down and eat, but a few ladies come get “carry out.” When ladies are cooking, we smile at each other as I go to the front counter to pay my bill.

I have never been afraid for a second.

I do not know about the stabbing (on Aug. 25, police say one Somali stabbed another), but that certainly is not “foreign” in this country.

I hope these young people who are taking jobs that may be hard to fill are given a chance to make friends in our country, which has always been a place of opportunity for refugees – until recently (Judd 2007).

Other established residents stopped by to eat at the café, although the café owner reported that many customers “stopped coming” after the TB rumors surfaced (Stafford 2008).

One did not need to live in Emporia to find out what people were saying about the refugee population. The rumor mill reached new heights with the *Emporia Gazette*’s new “forum” feature that was added to its online news-site in the fall of 2006. The forum, often referred to as “the blogs” in Emporia, allowed readers to add a comment below any online *Gazette* article. Forum users signed in using usernames and were able to remain anonymous. The Somali refugees became the topic, or rather the target, of frequent discussion in these online public forums.

The following section characterizes the most common threads in the rumors that forum users circulated about the Somali refugees. Three common themes that stand out in the forum comments are Somalis as a threat to community safety, Somalis as a threat to community health, and Somalis as a threat to community resources.

Some of the most common points of contention are posted below the December 14 *Gazette* article, “Meeting...” mentioned above. The first post points out the fact that the refugees practice Islam. This was not a rumor, but forum users often suggested that the refugees’ Muslim faith made them hostile to non-Muslims:

Posted by [hottopics](#) ([anonymous](#)) on December 14, 2006 at 4:10 p.m.
Just two days ago, I passed a car with three bumper stickers on it. One stated "ISLAM IS THE SOLUTION" right next to it another that said SOMALIA and their flag. Then below it a American Flag sticker. No further comment at this time.

The second post brings up two issues: the refugees were unsafe drivers, and they behaved rudely in public. Both of these issues would arise repeatedly in the Emporia blogosphere:

Posted by cookatwork (anonymous) on December 14, 2006 at 11:03 p.m.

I don't have a problem with other cultures moving to this country (our country was built on diversity when our ancestors moved here to find a better life) - what I DO have a problem with is other cultures treating me as if I should bow to them and change my way of life to fit theirs. (Our ancestors were in fear of NOT following what America desired of them).

When I was at WalMart, about a month ago, I was standing in a check-out line and a male refugee just stepped in front of me and told me that women always go last. If they are here out of fear for their lives, in their own country, then they need to be more mindful of the country they have moved to and the fact that in MANY places in this country an act like cutting someone off or demeaning them could get them hurt.

I have also been cut off more than ONCE (and I mean my vehicle had to literally make a sharp turn into another lane to avoid them hitting me) by a car full of refugees and what is worse - they have picked up an international form of sign language that just made me even more angry than being cut off.

I'll be honest - it makes tolerance very hard. And... one or two are going to harm the way people see the group.

In Emporia, as in many other small Midwestern communities, the ability to drive is an important skill. Somalis, like other Emporians, found that they needed cars for personal transportation. Many purchased cars and applied for driver's licenses in Emporia.

A major complaint among Emporians was that Somalis were poor drivers. Traffic accidents involving Somalis attracted negative attention. On March 29, 2007, the *Emporia Gazette* published a front-page photo of the Ayan Café (the Somali restaurant) with the front end of a car protruding through the front window. A Somali driver reportedly lost control of her car as she turned into the restaurant's parking lot and finally crashed into the front window. Three people, including the driver, were

injured in the accident (Mlynar 2007f). This online story garnered a number of forum postings like the following:

Posted by johnncanyon (anonymous) on March 29, 2007 at 2:37 p.m.

Thats the second building, that I know of, to be run into by a Somalian. Its bad enough having to dodge them on the streets. Now we are not even safe in a building, on a sidewalk or in a parking lot. Do they give the Somalians a driving test befor, giving them a drivers lisence, or is that just one of the many free things they get when they come into our country?

Posted by Mommy_15 (anonymous) on March 29, 2007 at 2:47 p.m.

I may not be the best driver on the road but I sure as heck have never done or ever came close to doing any of the following. Lose control turning into a parking lot and run over a man. Drive into a pole that is 5 feet away from the street. Mistake the brake pedal for the gas pedal and drive into a house almost seriously injuring a baby. Do these people who are driving these vehicles actually pass the same driving tests everyone else has to take and if so HOW??? When is enough going to be enough?

Posted by tunit (anonymous) on March 29, 2007 at 4 p.m.

It is not the fact that Somalians are bad drivers, but they do not understand the traffic laws. I know of several cases where they have been involved in an accident with a vehicle and they leave the scene. Also, it seems to be that Somalians think that when they get a instructional permit, they think that it is a license to drive without a licensed driver. There are a lot of Somalians driving around with only a instructional permit without a licensed driver or they are driving on a restricted license outside of their restriction.

When law enforcement officials were asked to calculate the number of traffic accidents that actually involved Somali drivers in November 2007, they reported that 60 out of 1,450 total accidents in 2007 had involved Somalis. Of those, thirty-three were injury accidents, sixteen were non-injury accidents, and 11 were hit-and-run accidents. Law enforcement officials also reported that the Somalis did have valid driver's licenses as well as registration, insurance, and tags (Mlynar 2007j).

The third response to the December 14 article mentions *Black Hawk Down*, and brings up another common thread in many Emporian's complaints about

Somalis; the refugees were, according to town gossip, receiving benefits, or subsidies, or “special treatment” from the government, and at the same time straining the city or county’s resources and benefiting from local people’s tax dollars.

Posted by westaber (anonymous) on December 15, 2006 at 2:04 a.m.

The thing I don't understand is how the Somalia's got in the U.S.A. after killing are troops from Black Down? Also I want to know why the SRS & Social Security give them are money we have work for and can't get?

The idea that refugees would drain local resources was a major concern among established residents. Forum users demanded answers from city government, asking for official figures on the kinds of assistance that refugees were receiving and how much this was costing the individual taxpayer.

Few forum users mentioned race in their comments. Infrequently, comments were removed from the forum by the *Gazette* staff. This does not necessarily mean that the content was offensive since there are multiple offenses that would violate the site’s User Policy. In some comments, users mentioned race either to accuse other forum users of racism or to defend their arguments as having nothing whatsoever to do with race. In the following comment, posted in a thread created especially for discussion of refugee resettlement in November 2007, the author asserted that their grievances were related to lack of resources in the community and not to prejudice:

Posted by hottopics (anonymous) on November 28, 2007 at 9:22 p.m.

Its not about immigrants coming to America. Its how they have been dumped in small town America who does not have the resources to support them Then its about their actions, behavior and disregard to the community and the ways of our country.

Its not about clothing, race or religion. This community cant support itself on the crazy high taxes and lack of jobs as it is. And we dont appreciate the immigrants

making requests for special attention. Dropping them here was the worst place they could have picked.

Some of these complaints regarding community resources were focused on specific community resources such as education and health care. The following sections will address these fears and the actual responses to newcomers in schools and in the health community.

Effects on Community Resources

Schools

Schools are important sites of interaction between established residents and newcomers. One of the concerns mentioned often in the online forum was the idea that Emporia's schools would be strained by an influx of students:

Posted by emporian (anonymous) on November 9, 2007 at 5:10 p.m.
Here is what a friend from Norfolk had to say:
Do ANYTHING you can to discourage this from happening. Absolutely NO GOOD can come from it. Your crime rate WILL increase 100 fold including theft, gangs, murder...ah hell, you name it!
Your taxes will go up because of the increase of students in schools and the need to build more schools... (Posted in response to Larson 2007)

Public school teachers and staff members who participated in interviews did not indicate a great deal of difficulty in adjusting to the newcomers. The Somali students who did enroll in Emporia schools did not create the kind of disruption in the education system that forum users had been predicting. This was because, first, there were very few children among the Somali newcomers, and second, because Emporia schools already had services in place for newcomers.

The Emporia Unified School District was prepared to deal with a diverse student population. The district enrolled 4,809 students in the 2007-2008 school year. According to the school district's student diversity statistics, 44.9 percent of these students were white, 5.2 percent were black, 41.3 percent were Hispanic, 5.8 percent were Multiethnic, 0.48 percent were Indian and 2.3 percent were Asian. As recently as the 1986-1987 school year, the student body had been 85.0 percent white (Emporia USD 253 2008). In addition to English, USD 253 students speak Chinese, Cambodian, Laotian, Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, and Somali. The district enrolled 1,472 English Language Learner (ELL) students in 2007-8, representing 29 percent of the total enrollment. The district employs 29 ELL teachers, and the ELL student-teacher ratio was 51:1 in 2007-8 (EPS 2008).

The schools were notified early in 2006 that Tyson would be hiring a number of workers from the Norfolk, Nebraska plant, including some Somali refugees. The district began to prepare for the possibility that many of the Somali workers would bring families and children. However, despite the large number of Somalis who did arrive in Emporia, most were young adults who either were single or did not bring their small children. The school district's migrant recruiter recalled that she had called a school official in Norfolk to ask how they had responded to the Somali students. "Before Tyson closed in Nebraska, they told us they were coming, so we were getting ready," she said. "I called up Nebraska and said what do we need to get done? (...) We were getting ready, and then we didn't have anybody (Somali

students) that came in!” (Interview with USD 253 Migrant Community Resource Coordinator/Recruiter, July 3, 2008).

As of November 2007, there were only 2 Somali students enrolled in pre-kindergarten through 6th grades, and only one was placed in ELL classrooms. There were 11 Somali students in grades 7 through 12, and 8 of them were enrolled in ELL classes (Mlynar 2007j). School employees indicate that these small numbers of students were incorporated into classrooms with relative ease.

One student successfully completed her high school education at Emporia High School. The Emporia Public Schools *Annual Report to the Community* included a segment entitled “Success Stories,” which profiled individual students in the district. One profile was a snapshot of Safiya Sheikh, a 19-year-old December graduate of Emporia High School. The story says that Safiya speaks Somali and Swahili in addition to English. She had lived in the United States since she was 16, initially settling in Maine with her family, then moving to Nebraska to live with her aunt who worked for Tyson. Her plan after graduation was to continue her education in health and practical nursing at the local technical college so that she could continue living in Emporia. The article reported that Safiya was pleased with the high school:

At EHS, she said teachers, staff and students have been respectful of her and her cultural practices. She does not wear full Muslim dress but she does wear a hijab (a Muslim woman’s head covering). She appreciated that the food service staff made her aware of menu items that contain pork, which she does not eat. She also appreciated that one of her teachers provided her access to an empty classroom during lunch so she could pray at school (EPS 2008b).

There were few Somali students in Emporia Middle School (EMS), but according to one 7th grade social studies teacher, the rumors about Somalis were prevalent in student gossip during the 2006-2007 academic year. The teacher felt that students were hearing misinformation from their parents and spreading the rumors at school. The most prominent rumors, the teacher recalled, were rumors that Somali men had raped a woman behind the local Dairy Queen. The teacher perceived that the rape rumor was growing and changing every time he heard it. He recalled that he had seen the documentary, "The Letter," about Lewiston, Maine, a small town where Somali refugees faced a strong backlash from community members, including the mayor (Hamzeh et al. 2003). The students' comments about the Somali newcomers, he felt, were disturbingly similar to the negative comments he remembered from the story of Lewiston. The teacher became so concerned with the persistence of the rape rumors as well as the negative comments about the refugees' hygiene, rudeness and driving, that he decided to incorporate lessons about Somalia and refugees into his lesson plan.

He also decided to organize a panel of Somali refugees to come to EMS and speak to the 7th grade students at the end of the educational unit about Somali culture. He contacted an instructor at the Flint Hills Learning Center, where many adult Somali students were attending English classes for credit toward high school diplomas. The teachers wanted to avoid allowing the students to make inappropriate comments, so they solicited questions from the 7th grade students in advance, and chose twenty questions that the students would be allowed to ask (Interview with

EMS teacher, May 27, 2008). On May 16, 2007, the panel of 12 Somali women and men addressed the 330 students, some of them speaking through an interpreter. An article about the panel appeared on the USD 253 website:

The EMS students learned that Somalis speak many languages, most commonly Somali, Arabic and Swahili. All members of the panel are learning English and the EMS project gave them a chance to practice their new language skills. Somalis love soccer and they miss their families who remain in Africa (Horst 2007).

Since the panel took place close to the end of the school year, the teacher felt unable to say to what extent the panel discussion quelled the rumors among his 7th graders, but he remembers that immediately after the panel, students expressed surprise that they shared more similarities than expected with the Somali panelists.

Since the vast majority of the Somalis in Emporia were single adults, schools providing adult education were impacted to a much greater degree than the primary, middle or secondary schools. The school district's Migrant Community Resource Coordinator/Recruiter worked to make contact with as many of the Somali newcomers as possible so that she could identify individuals who were under 22 years of age and were possibly eligible for services. She hired a Somali woman as an interpreter (and later hired a second interpreter) who accompanied her in visits to the newcomers' apartments to interview them and assess their needs. Her interpreter, she says, was a great asset, because she already knew "everyone" and she could easily walk into the homes of her Somali neighbors and start a conversation. She would tell them, "you shouldn't be sleeping, you should be going to school!" (Interview with USD 253 Migrant Community Resource Coordinator/Recruiter, July 3, 2008). Some

adults under the age of 22 enrolled in a GED preparation program called Project Destiny. This program required some English proficiency. Many of the Somali adults did not have the required English skills and enrolled in English language instruction instead.

One provider of English classes for adults is the Flint Hills Learning Center (FHLC). FHLC is an extension of Emporia High School, providing classes for credit toward the completion of a high school diploma. According to one of the center's English Language Learner (ELL) instructors, there were approximately 100 Somali students enrolled in FHLC English classes. She estimated that 85 to 90 percent of the Somali students were also working. Many attended morning classes so that they could work the second shift at Tyson.

When asked if the ELL services offered at FHLC were easily adapted to the new Somali students, the instructor said they were not. The main challenge she cited was the language barrier. Since the instructor spoke Spanish, she was able to communicate with Spanish speaking students easily. Asian students in her classes tended to arrive with several years of education and at least enough English to get by in class. The Somali students tended to have few English skills and, the teacher estimated, less formal education.

The instructor also felt that tension between Hispanic and Somali students presented a challenge at first. Hispanic students at times referred to the Somalis in a negative tone as "los negros." She perceived that the tension began to diminish as she pushed the two groups into activities in which they had to mix, talk to each other,

and ask each other questions. In the long run, however, the differing language levels among the students posed problems. The instructor decided to split the classes into low- beginner and high- beginner sections. Most Somalis fell into the low- beginner section while the high-beginner section included mostly Hispanic students (Interview with ELL instructor, May 27, 2008).

The other English language learning opportunity for the Somali adults was the Adult Education Center (AEC), a branch of the Flint Hills Technical College. The co-director of the center and English as Second Language (ESL) instructor was the first to work with Somali students in Spring 2006. The first class she taught was a night class for about nine men who worked the A-shift at Tyson. She felt that the center must have met the approval of these students because from then on there were normally about 150 Somali men and women enrolled in the center. The AEC evaluates new students' literacy levels using standardized proficiency tests. The instructor reported that most of the Somalis tested at low-level. Many had higher levels of speaking skills than reading and writing skills.

Another challenge the AEC instructor noted was animosity toward her Somali students. She did not see any exceptional animosity between Somali and Hispanic students in ESL classes. Instead, she found that non-Somali students stopped attending other adult basic education (ABE) classes offered at the center when the number of Somali students attending ESL classes grew. She had to move her ABE classes to another facility across town, she said, before attendance improved again. The AEC was also vandalized with paintballs twice. She felt that

this was because the AEC was located downtown and there were community members who resented that the center was bringing such a large group of Somalis to the downtown area (Interview with AEC Co-director/Instructor, May 29, 2008).

In conclusion, there were real challenges associated with the arrival of Somali newcomers, especially in providing crucial ESL instruction to such a large population of Somali adults. However, adult education providers were learning through trial and error how to adjust and meet the needs of these students. Fears that newcomers posed a threat to the education system seemed to far outweigh the actual impact, however, and rumors and fears regarding the newcomers actually created some of the disruption in the provision of education services.

Healthcare

Another source of concern for many Emporia residents was the public health impact of the refugee population. Emporians were concerned not only about the possibility that the refugees were infected with TB or HIV/AIDS, but also with the fact that the refugees were frequenting the community health center, and that they would strain local health resources.

The Refugee Act of 1980 established guidelines for refugee services across the United States. Among these services is the refugee health assessment. A refugee may undergo two or three examinations during the emigration process. At the point of entry into the United States, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reviews each refugee's overseas health documents to identify any health issues that

may need attention. The local health department in the primary destination state is notified of these conditions. The domestic health assessment in the state of primary resettlement is recommended – not mandatory (MDH 2007).

Although Emporia was not the primary settlement destination for any of the Somali refugees, many of them still needed to complete their health screenings upon arrival in Emporia. When Somali refugees visited the health center without proof of having completed the screening, the patients were examined in Emporia. The health center also performed follow-up screenings and treatments (Mlynar 2007k). Public health workers were also chiefly concerned with helping their Somali patients who had latent TB comply with their regimens of prophylactic medication that would ensure that the disease would not become active (Mlynar 2006a). All of the services provided, according to the director of the health center, were within the normal scope of their services; the difference was in the increased demand for services.

And as the refugee population grew, the need for interpreters at the hospital and health center became more and more vital. In the beginning the only Somali language resource available was a “language line” – interpretation provided over the phone. Since the Somalis knew who among them could speak English, though, they sometimes enlisted the help of one or two individuals. The nursing staff would see one person coming in with a whole group of people, ready to interpret for all of them. The health department ended up hiring one Somali man who had been constantly called upon to interpret anyway, but he was also working a shift at Tyson. He was able to work an hour in the morning and an hour in the afternoon, before and

after his shift, which did not begin to meet the department's interpretation needs.

They hired a full-time interpreter, but she often needed to be in 2 or 3 places at once; the front desk, the public health department, dental services, the primary care clinic – so many offices were in need of her services (Interviews with public health staff, May 28, 2008).

A large part of the challenge facing public health officials was again counteracting the fear and rumors that were spreading throughout the community. On January 4th, 2007, a 20-year-old Somali man working at the Tyson plant died. The death was first reported as a work-related accident, but the coroner's office soon reported that the man also had active tuberculosis. The health department responded by starting an investigation, interviewing and testing, when necessary, the victim's personal contacts and co-workers (Mlynar 2007c).

Prior to the accident, the health department had worked to spread the word that although certain refugee populations exhibit high rates of TB infection, the TB cases documented among the refugees in Emporia were latent, not active TB. Latent TB, unlike active TB, is not infectious. Now that an active case had been documented, rumors of a public health scare gained new life. The fact that the infected man had been working with food products also caused concern. On January 18, health officials spent the day at Tyson answering questions about TB, and explaining that the disease is only infectious through the lungs, and not through the food supply. The next day, they spoke to the school district, and on January 29, they gave a presentation at Wal-Mart because people were concerned about shopping

there (Mlynar 2007d). The health department's investigation uncovered no other active cases of TB in connection with the Tyson plant (Mlynar 2007e). Still, TB remained a topic in the forum:

Posted by midnight_rider (anonymous) on March 30, 2007 at 7:20 a.m.
(...) Does anyone remember Ellis Island, Remember the place where probably most of your great-grandparents passed through, before they were allowed to live in America. They had to pass physical tests, etc., and If they did not pass they were sent back. Some how it just does not seem fair that they can bring their TB and HIV into our community and the community leaders and health department do nothing about it.

In November, 2007, eleven months after the young man's death, concern about public health was still a major topic of debate in the community. The *Gazette* printed a series of answers to questions from community members on the subject: "Questions about Refugee Health are Answered" (Mlynar 2007k). The questions dealt with not only the health risks posed by the newcomers, but also the possibility that the costs of treating the refugees might fall upon Lyon County taxpayers. The questions included:

Are the refugees screened in any meaningful way? Who does the screening?

Is Emporia equipped to handle an outbreak of diseases commonly associated with third-world countries?

Why are so many Somalis using the Flint Hills Community Health Center when they have jobs at Tyson? Doesn't Tyson offer health insurance to Somalis as it does to other workers?

How much more is it costing Lyon County to test and treat the refugees? What's been added to the budget because of that?

How many cases of TB are there in Lyon County? (Mlynar 2007k)

In the article, the health center director explained that refugees undergo health screenings before entering the United States, that Somalis have health insurance just like other Tyson workers, and that additional expenses were not falling on the shoulders of Lyon County taxpayers.

According to Flint Hills Community Health Center Public Health staff members, one public health nurse added one day of work to her schedule and was assigned to TB cases to accommodate the needs of the Somali population. However, the three health center staff members who responded to interviews agree that the majority of Somali patients were conscientious about paying their bills on time, and the public health department requested no additional city or county resources to aid this population (Email correspondence with FHCHC Director, Public Health Manager, and Public Health nurse in TB Program, 08/26/2008).

Again, real challenges existed in integrating Somali newcomers in the health community. Language barriers complicated the provision of services. Somali patients sometimes faced frustrations over confusing billing and health insurance processes that were new to them. Healthcare providers were actively learning about this new culture and working on solutions for interpreting needs. Public health workers also faced a great challenge in addressing fears within the community, however, finding misperceptions about refugee health extremely difficult to correct.

The Emporia Refugee Resettlement Alliance

The Emporia Refugee Resettlement Alliance (ERRA) grew out of an already existing organization of community leaders, the Healthier Community Alliance (HCA). The goal of HCA was:

to improve the security and well-being of individuals and families in the Emporia community through diverse agencies and business working cooperatively to provide high quality health care, education, employment, and economic opportunities that foster self-reliance, lifelong learning, quality of life, and a sense of planned community growth and prosperity (HCA 2000).

The HCA was composed of representatives of various community organizations and businesses. The Executive Director of the Flint Hills Community Health Center (FCHC) was serving as the chairperson of the HCA in the early part of 2006. She had seen increasing numbers of Somali refugees coming into the health center seeking services. As a growing number of leaders in various organizations and businesses began to take notice of the growing Somali population, and of the alarming rumors spreading around town, HCA members made the decision to have a larger meeting of community stakeholders to talk about issues that had arisen with the refugees. Those in attendance at that initial meeting in October 2006 decided to meet on an ongoing basis, and the first Emporia Refugee Resettlement Alliance meeting was held in November 2006 (Interview with Executive Director of FHCHC, May 28, 2008).

The first chairperson of the ERRA, the Director of Multicultural Programs and Services at Emporia State University, issued a press release describing the goals

of the organization and the *Gazette* published an article about the ERRA on

November 11, 2006:

“The Somali refugees have chosen to call Emporia ‘home,’ and it is the ERRA’s wish to help them acclimate to their new surroundings while helping Emporians adjust to the arrival of their new refugee neighbors,” Nelson said.

ERRA is made up of representatives from the health center, SRS, Flint Hills Technical College Adult Education Center, Tyson Fresh Meats, the City of Emporia, the Emporia school district, the Emporia Area Chamber of Commerce and Convention & Visitors Bureau, the United Way and Newman Regional Health. Two Somalians also are members of the group. Both work at Tyson and one also is a part-time student at ESU.

“We’ve got issues connected to health and safety, transportation, driver’s education, education, English language training, social services, and also development of cross-cultural awareness and understanding,” Nelson said.

The group will emphasize cross-cultural training — educating Lyon Countians to the cultural and religious traditions of the Somalis and educating Somalis to the cultural and religious traditions of Americans in general, and Lyon County, in particular.

“It’s a cross-cultural exchange,” Nelson said; “it’s not one-sided. ... I want to make sure that the Emporia community knows that there will be education on both sides.” (Mlynar 2006a).

Several individuals in Emporia saw the importance of involving the Somali community in any efforts to smooth the integration process. To what extent did the ERRA serve as a mediating structure between Somali newcomers and established residents? ERRA membership overwhelmingly included established residents who attended meetings as representatives of local organizations, institutions, and service providers. There were normally between 1 and 3 Somali individuals present at the meetings. The Somali individuals who did attend ERRA meetings delivered reports on the Somali community as a whole. They were expected to serve as liaisons between the ERRA and the Somali community, while the representatives of the

various community organizations were expected to take what they learned in ERRA meetings to their respective organizations.

The ERRA's early initiatives included addressing the rumors that were circulating around the community in order to quell tensions between Somali newcomers and established residents; cooperating with a community organization that focused on the needs of the Hispanic community, Friends in Faith Serving Emporia; and cooperating with Catholic Charities, the voluntary agency that would administer grant money allocated for refugee resettlement. These efforts are discussed in detail in the following sections.

Rumor Control

Many ERRA members became involved in the organization because they were alarmed by the rumors that they had heard about the Somalis and because they were concerned with finding reliable sources of information to guide them in dealing with the newcomers. Rumor control was often the second item on the ERRA meeting agenda after new business. Throughout the week, ERRA members took note of the rumors they were hearing, emailing the recent gossip about the Somalis to the chairperson so that she could hunt down the facts.

The *Gazette* was invited to send a reporter to the first meeting so that the dialogue would reach the Emporia community. One of the issues addressed at the first meeting was that of public health. The public health representatives wanted to spread the message that, although the Somalis were often seen at the community

health center and the hospital, they were not creating a public health crisis.

According to the *Gazette* article about that first meeting, “Group Promotes

Understanding: Emporians, Somalians Work Together to Promote Understanding”:

“Every refugee from Somalia is known by name, point of origin, date of entry. The United States government has all of this information,” Nelson said. “The refugees have two full medical screenings, one before they leave their country of origin, one when they arrive” in the U.S.

“Everyone is fully screened and there are medical services available to the Somali refugees because of their status as refugees,” she said. Nelson said they have been tested for tuberculosis, HIV and other transmittable diseases.

Renee Hively of the Flint Hills Community Health Center said that Somalis commonly show latent TB when they are tested.

“It’s very prevalent in their area, so the chances are, they’ve been exposed to the tuberculosis germ is high,” Hively said. “The majority do test positive.” Those Somalians are on drug therapy.

“They’re not at the infectious stage any more where they could be spreading it,” Hively said (Mlynar 2006a)

During “rumor control” sessions, ERRA members would discuss reliable sources of information to dispel rumors before they could get out of control. Somali individuals were present at most meetings and they explained their perspectives on the rumors. They also shared concerns that they were hearing among the Somali community. Among the concerns that Somali representatives expressed at one of the early meetings was that Somalis were aware and concerned about what was being said about them in Emporia. The chairperson asked ERRA members to go directly to the individuals from whom they had originally heard the rumors, tell them what they had learned, and ask them to dispel misinformation whenever they heard it. Because

ERRA members represented a range of community organizations, they hoped to be able to reach a broad cross-section of the community in this way.

As ERRA members brought up rumors or questions that needed to be addressed and found reliable sources of information regarding these concerns, the chairperson would compile the information in a fact sheet called “Talking Points” that was distributed to all ERRA members. “Talking Points” also included information about the Somali newcomers and refugees in general so that ERRA members would be unified in their message as they addressed rumors or answered questions about the newcomers in their organizations or workplaces.

ERRA members also set out to find educational resources that would help both their alliance and the community at large to learn something about Somali culture and the circumstances that led the Somali refugees to flee their homes and eventually arrive in Emporia. One of the ERRA’s first initiatives was inviting the Spring Institute (SI) for Intercultural Learning, a Denver-based nonprofit corporation that specializes in language and culture training and consulting, to Emporia. The Spring Institute consultants first visited Emporia in December, 2006, addressing staff members at the hospital, in law enforcement, in the school district, in city and county government, and at Tyson. According to the *Gazette* article on the SI visit:

Dunn and Adkins (Spring Institute representatives) praised Emporia for trying to understand things so early on. Many times, they said, they’re invited to a city when things have deteriorated and bridges need to be rebuilt in a hurry. “You have the opportunity to address this before it gets out of hand,” Lewis agreed. “It can get out of hand. And you as a community have the choice, whether to let it get out of hand or whether you want to make it work” (*Emporia Gazette* 2006).

The consultants addressed questions that were troubling community members on topics including why the Somalis might congregate in large groups and why the women were covered (*Emporia Gazette* 2007).

After presenting educational sessions throughout Emporia, the SI representatives met with ERRA members. Many ERRA members felt that the Spring Institute visit was very beneficial as the organization had years of experience with intercultural learning and provided valuable educational resources to acquaint established residents with the newcomers' cultural backgrounds and the challenges they would face in adjusting to life in Emporia.

Hispanic Relations

The ERRA eventually added time for "Building Hispanic Relations" to the agenda, since there seemed to be many sources of tension between Emporia's Hispanic community and the Somali refugees. The Director of Friends in Faith Serving Emporia, an organization that worked to assist with the integration of Hispanic community in Emporia, attended ERRA meetings and reported on Hispanic/Somali relations. One source of contention was misunderstandings between members of the two groups in the workplace. According to the director of Friends in Faith, workers on the meat disassembly line, many of whom were Hispanic, were upset that Somali workers were allowed to leave the line to pray. They saw this as a "privilege" that Somalis enjoyed exclusively, while those left on the line were expected to work harder (Interview May 23, 2008).

Friends in Faith members worked to create more open communication between leaders in the Hispanic community and the Somali elders. The organization arranged meetings at area churches at which the Somali elders could speak with leaders of the Hispanic community and the pastors of Anglo churches. The organization arranged for interpreters at these meetings so that leaders of the various communities could interact despite language barriers. Friends in Faith also organized social events such as a potluck, which members of the organization saw as a success in bringing members of the Hispanic community and the Somali community together.

Cooperation with Catholic Charities

The United States Department of State cooperates with voluntary agencies in administering refugee resettlement services. Many of these agencies are faith-based organizations. In Emporia, Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas, based in Kansas City, became involved in the resettlement process in Emporia after Social and Rehabilitative Services (SRS) officials learned about the large refugee population and began the process to bring grant funding to Emporia. One of Catholic Charities' priorities was to begin learning more about the size and the needs of the refugee population.

At the November 2, 2007 ERRA meeting, the State Refugee Coordinator for Kansas Social and Rehabilitation Services announced that Catholic Social Services would receive a grant of \$109,495.00 that would be used for direct services for

refugees who had been in the United States for five years or less. The Director of Migrant and Refugee Services for Catholic Charities reported that the grant money would be used to set up an office in Emporia that would provide referral and intermediary services for refugees and provide information for local Somalis and for the community. Once the office was established, two case managers would be hired, one full-time and one half-time. Preference for these jobs would be given to local Somali individuals. According to the minutes of that meeting: “The Somali community agrees that this is very important for better acceptance” (ERRA 2007a). At the same meeting, copies of the report from the most recent Spring Institute visit – the organization had returned to Emporia for a follow-up visit in August – were distributed. The SI recommended that the ERRA focus on assisting with the Catholic Social Services office in Emporia, and on identifying a group of Somalis to help with this project and to identify the Somali community’s needs (ERRA 2007a).

Perceptions Impede Integration

Emporia the Refugee Camp

By November 2007, the ERRA had been in existence for a year. In many ways ERRA members felt that they were making strides. However, a *Gazette* story covering the November 2 ERRA meeting added fuel to the fire of controversy over the Somali refugee population in Emporia. The article, “Emporia Readies for More Somali Refugees,” published on November 3, began with the statement: “Emporia may become a major settling point for refugees within the next several years, and a

diverse committee of local, state, and private leaders is working to prepare for the next step.” The representative of Catholic Charities was quoted as saying that he expected Emporia to “be developed as a refugee center” (Mlynar 2007g). According to ERRA members, this quote was taken out of context by many Emporians. Emporia would not have become a site for direct resettlement in the sense of larger cities that receive large groups of refugees as primary resettlement locations. Considering the number of Somalis already in Emporia, however, the possibility existed that there would be some cases of family reunification. A local CSS office would serve the needs of these individuals (Interview with SRS State Refugee Coordinator, June 18, 2008).

The *Gazette* article, for some, was interpreted as an announcement that an unknown number of additional refugees would be “brought” to Emporia. By November 9, over 400 people had already commented on the story in the online forum (Larson 2007). Forum users wrote that city leaders were moving to turn Emporia into a “refugee camp.” Three examples follow, all posted in response to the November 3 story:

Posted by pizza (anonymous) on November 3, 2007 at 10:24 a.m.
Doesn't anybody, except greenday, see what a stupid, idiotic thing this is? Many folks have worked lifetimes to build homes, businesses, and dreams here and now are allowng the whole thing to be turned into a huge, welfare supported slum. I'll never, ever understand.....

Posted by houndi (anonymous) on November 3, 2007 at 10:44 a.m.
I agree with greenday & pizza emporia is turning into refugee camp. First it was the V.C. and then the illegal "s where is this going to end. We can't even get on welfare if we need it. We have homeless people in emporia who can't get help.

Posted by emporialive (anonymous) on November 4, 2007 at 8:42 a.m.

What a nightmare, we cannot even support the people who live and work in Emporia as it is but we allow our tax dollars to cater to every need the Somalis. Emporia has become the joke of Kansas it's no wonder companies don't want to build here and this is only making things worse.

The city and county are always talking about how they want to improve Emporia and if this is their idea of improving it I wish they would have left things be, as with many people here have stated they do not wish to live in a "REFUGEE CENTER" and I can't blame one person for not wanting to live here after this.

Jobs in this town are going away at an alarming rate yet we will add more issues to deal with and less income to the people who have lived here their entire life.

What is going to happen in our schools when our children get less help due to the Somali children taking time away from our kids that need help only because Somali children need more help. What will happen to the no child left behind program, maybe they should start a no Somali left behind program and take away funding from our already poorly funded schools.

The local government needs to wake up and see what this is doing to Emporia before it is too late, if it isn't already. I for one do not want Emporia known as the REFUGEE WELFARE CENTER (Posted in response to Larson, 2007).

One forum user addressed a *Gazette* reporter, asking that a "reader poll" be posted on the website:

Posted by vankamp (anonymous) on November 4, 2007 at 11:30 a.m.
Gwen Larson..

Do you suppose the Gazette could ask the question on the next reader poll: Are you for Emporia becoming a major settling point for refugees? I would be interested in how the poll would turn out.

The poll appeared in the November 9 article, "Group Says Info Lacking on

Resettlement: Worried Emporians Ask for Answers," by Gwendolynne Larson

(2007):

Do you want Emporia to become a direct resettlement community for refugees?

| | | |
|-----------|-----|------------|
| Yes | 7% | 146 votes |
| No | 89% | 1804 votes |
| Undecided | 2% | 57 votes |

That November 9 *Gazette* article was about a group of over 25 people that was forming to fight the move to make Emporia a "refugee resettlement point." The meeting had been organized by forum users who had met on the *Gazette* website:

“Thursday night’s meeting was organized by people who posted comments to the story on the *Gazette*’s web site. Many of them introduced themselves to the group with both their given names and screen names” (Larson 2007).

Emporia’s city manager took notice of the forum users’ comments. In a meeting of the Emporia Human Relations Commission, he discussed the need to organize a community-wide informational meeting:

City Manager Matt Zimmerman, who attended the meeting, said that many who have posted comments have legitimate concerns about questions that have not yet been answered about plans for the refugees.

“The city commission feels we need to have a public meeting,” Zimmerman said. “Invite all the agencies to come talk about costs involved. ... I think it needs to come from the agencies that are doing the work. And we’re going to invite the people who are talking on the blogs. The city commission feels there’s a lot of legitimate concerns” (Mlynar 2007h).

Several forum users responded to this story, and many of the postings pointed out that the city manager was right to say that the cost involved with refugee resettlement was the real issue at hand. Some users chastised the human relations commission director for “playing the race card.”

Posted by [citizenT](#) ([anonymous](#)) on November 14, 2007 at 7:02 a.m.

Bravo Matt Zimmerman for stating (and restating) the issue at hand when others at your meeting wanted to turn this issue into something about race! The majority of the bloggers on this issue have REPEATEDLY stated that their concerns are about the economic effect on our community. I am sick of people throwing out the race card to deflect from the real issues! It is so much easier to hide behind the term racism than it is to answer the community's legitimate questions. HRC representatives need to stop giving the minority of idiots the time of day and listen to the real issues stated by the majority and give some answers!

Posted by [emporialive](#) ([anonymous](#)) on November 14, 2007 at 10:28 a.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Patty Gilligan quit playing the race card and deal with the real issues. According to your job description you should be checking into why Tyson will only hire refugees not anyone else. To me that would be discrimination against non refugees. So before you act out that everyone is making this a race issue maybe you should do your job and quit hiding the truth from the people of Emporia (...)

Gilligan had never been quoted as specifically mentioning race in the article. Instead, she had discussed issues of culture, language, religion, and customs, which she saw as common themes in community members' comments and rumors about the Somali refugees:

Gilligan said that culture, language, religion, and customs dictated by that religion seemed to be significant problems seen by Emporians. Much work already has been done to build trust in Emporia within the Somali community.

"But now I think we need to go back and build some trust in our own community," Gilligan said.

The commission also discussed ways to involve the Somali community in the public meeting, and decided that a Somali elder should be involved in planning the panel discussion.

A Community Meeting

On November 28, 2007, the city held a community-wide forum on refugees organized in response to the controversy. A panel composed of city, school, and public health officials, the state refugee coordinator and Tyson's human resources manager was available to answer the community members' questions. The meeting attracted a standing room-only crowd and many of those in attendance had something to say. The meeting started at 7:00 pm and

continued until about 11:00 pm. According to the *Gazette* article covering the meeting:

A few audience members occasionally interrupted questions and answers with shouts and criticism during the first portion of the meeting. After a 10-minute break about 2 hours into the meeting, the crowd in general grew more tolerant of the answers coming from the panel lined in front of the stage (Mlynar 2007j).

Audience members expressed their concerns about the benefits that refugees were receiving, about their hygiene habits, and about the possibility that they would spread infectious diseases. Another community member asked that Emporians practice Christian love and welcome the newcomers. The Tyson representative reported that the government did not subsidize the hiring of refugee workers and that the Somalis received the same wages and benefits as other workers. Public health workers again explained the health department's preparedness to deal with tuberculosis cases. The state refugee coordinator described the tax-funded social services from which refugees may benefit. The police chief reported on the number of traffic accidents that had involved Somali drivers.

Another audience member stood up to say that Somalis should be taught about proper hygiene. He claimed that Somali women evidently did not use sanitary napkins. According to the *Gazette* article:

He paused and weighed aloud whether he should go on with an embarrassing subject concerning female Somalis.

"They don't wear sanitary napkins and they're walking in Wal-Mart and I've personally seen that myself, it dropping on the floor," he said (Mlynar 2007j).

This was one of the specific comments that many interview respondents remembered from the public meeting. One respondent recalled:

I thought that was the most despicable thing, the most insulting thing to a woman I have ever heard in my life- because the one thing I know about Somali women is they are very clean- it's just religious you know, they wash their hands every time they pray. But he said that and that was a lie (Interview May 23, 2008).

One nurse at the health department was also skeptical since she worked with so many Somali patients and she had never seen anything to confirm the comment. So later at work she asked her Somali interpreter to explain how Somali women approach personal hygiene. She explained what she had learned at the next ERRA meeting, where a Somali woman also talked about differences in hygiene practices.

There were also Somalis present at the city meeting, although there were no Somalis included in the speaker's panel. Two Somali audience members addressed the crowd. Their comments were reported in the *Gazette*:

One, who identified himself as Ahmed, said he had lived in the United States for almost 5 years and in Emporia for 1 year. A friend told him about job openings in Emporia, and he came here to better his life.

"I think all Somalis have this idea about people in Emporia. They are very nice people, very friendly people and very respectful people," Ahmed said.

That thought may be changing because of rumors about the Somalis and name-calling they are facing.

"And I think probably right now, I think Somalians are thinking ... to leave town," he said. They have become fearful of being harmed.

"My best thinking now is maybe you could give all of us another chance to become better to ourselves and maybe we become one community that respect and love each other." (Mlynar 2007j).

Some ERRA members were taken aback by the animosity and the misunderstandings that became apparent at the community meeting. "Up to that time, I had really felt pretty good about the progress that we had made," said a public

health official, “and then after that I thought, oh my gosh, we have so much more work to do!” Despite the negative tone of many audience members’ comments, she felt that the meeting was productive:

I think a lot of negative things came out, but I think it was a good thing, because it gave a formal and focused way for people to express those concerns – those negative issues as well as positive things – and to get an immediate response and feedback from the key community leaders that had been involved in responding and in helping lead the community response. So I do think it was a good thing (Interview May 28, 2008).

According to another ERRA member, the community meeting led her to doubt that the “rumor control” undertaken in the alliance meetings was changing public perceptions:

AS: How important was rumor control?

It was helpful to an extent unless you get out to the community (...) People from the community still were not aware of a lot of stuff. They had this big forum – a community meeting and it was standing-room only. And you should have seen what the people from the community thought. And I said okay – the Somalis have been here for two years- and you still think this? So obviously there was a breakdown in communication between what is actually true and what is being told to the community (May 27, 2008).

The community meeting at least served to bring people into a public arena where they could voice their concerns and see that community leaders were aware of their fears. It also made community leaders aware that there was still a great need for cross-cultural education that had not yet been met.

Cross-Cultural Education Initiatives

Following the community meeting, ERRA participation was at a high point. At the December, 2007 ERRA meeting, 38 members were in attendance, and the agenda included items that had come up during the community meeting. A city official attended and said that the meeting had been successful in quelling some of the rumors. One city councilman, who had been receiving as many as twenty emails and phone calls regarding the refugees per day, had received none since the meeting. They planned to monitor the online forums to stay abreast of new topics of concern.

Two Somali individuals discussed what they had been hearing among the Somali community since the community meeting. The Community Liaison said that some Somalis felt that the city had not defended them. She reported that she had tried to clear up any misconceptions among the Somali community. The Somali ERRA members also discussed aspects of Somali culture that had been called into question at the city meeting. They said that children are not required to pray five times a day until they reach age fifteen, and that the only accommodation asked of the schools was to let the Somali children know when pork would be served in advance so that they could bring a lunch from home.

Besides discussing the points of contention that had been brought up at the community meeting, ERRA members also discussed successes in improving mutual understanding and plans for educational and social programs. They were interested in involving more of the outside community in improving relations. The director of Friends in Faith Serving Emporia reported that the organization was continuing to

meet with the Somali elders to talk about ways to improve relationships. One ERRA member had attended a Muslim/Christian dialogue forum in Topeka, and volunteered to organize a similar event in Emporia. The forum in Topeka had consisted of a panel discussion followed by a question and answer session and a potluck (ERRA 2007b and Field Notes).

The Somali Community Liaison reported that meetings between the Somali elders and the Somali community were continuing, and that these meetings were vital since the Somali community was so mobile. The director of the Catholic Charities program in Emporia agreed that continuing education was necessary, and that once the new Catholic Charities office opened it could take on the role of doing monthly welcome sessions for newcomers. The group also talked about holding another, larger potluck like the November potluck organized by Friends in Faith that many felt had been successful in bringing together Somali and Hispanic community members. Another Somali representative said that the Somali community would be interested in interacting with more of the Caucasian community and asked that the ERRA members attend and bring their families.

The group discussed plans for a speaker's bureau that would link organizations with experts who had volunteered to speak about refugee issues. The newly hired SRS Regional Refugee Coordinator, a Somali individual, volunteered to teach educational sessions about the process of becoming a refugee and overseas health screenings as well as about Somali culture. Professionals from the health

community offered to continue speaking to groups about refugee health (ERRA 2008a).

Tyson Closes Beef Slaughter in Emporia

Many ERRA members felt that they were just beginning to build connections when the news came that many of Emporia's meatpacking workers, including the Somali refugees, would be losing their jobs. On January 25, 2008, Tyson announced to its workers in Emporia that the company would be closing its Emporia beef slaughter operation, eliminating 1,500 of 2,400 jobs. Workers in both first and second shift slaughter, as well as second shift processing, would work their last shifts on March 25 (Mlynar 2008a). The company announced that the decision was based on declines in the supply of beef cattle and the shift in cattle operations from Eastern Kansas to Western Kansas. The company also announced that it would be offering bonuses for workers to transfer to plants in other locations including Finney County, Kansas and Lexington, Nebraska (Mlynar 2008b).

On January 30, the *Gazette* ran the headline, "Somalis Will Relocate" (Mlynar 2008c). According to the story, the Somali community liaison said that the majority would be looking for jobs in other areas, many transferring to other Tyson plants, and those who did not find jobs would probably return to their families in Minnesota, Ohio, or Washington state.

At the following ERRA meeting, in February, those in attendance were still shocked by the news and trying to take stock of the situation. Discussion of the needs

of the Somali population was mixed with discussion of the needs of the community as a whole, as a large number of community members and families felt that their livelihoods were at stake.

The Director of Friends in Faith gave a report on his observations of the effects on the Hispanic community. Many Hispanic families who had been in the area for years or even generations feared that they would have to leave the area, he said. Many had roots in Emporia or Lyon County and did not want to leave. He was working with the city to organize a community fair where displaced workers could learn about job opportunities as well as community resources to assist them in their time of need. The representative of the Somali community, however, said that the Somali community received the news that they had lost their jobs with little sadness. The Somalis had come to Emporia to work and they had no roots in the area. Many had lost their jobs before, and they had survived much more difficult experiences in their lives than the loss of employment (Field notes, ERRRA meeting February 1, 2008).

ERRA Wrap-Up: Successes and Failures

The ERRRA held its last meeting on April 4, 2008. Many of the Somalis had already left town. The meeting was concluded with a look back on the organization's short history to discuss successes and failures.

Many members agreed that some of the most useful undertakings had been social events that allowed for interaction between Somalis and other community

members on an even plane. The potluck that had been intended to improve Somali/Hispanic relations was widely perceived as a success. Potluck participants had shared their stories, their food, and even music and dance. It was agreed that it would have been beneficial to hold such an event earlier and to involve the whole community. An ERRA meeting that was held at the Somali restaurant, the Ayan Café, was also seen as a success. ERRA members wished that they had met at the cafe earlier and also encouraged other agencies and organizations to meet there to show support for the Somali business.

Many ERRA members also felt that if another refugee population moves to Emporia, cultural education must start earlier. They saw the educational workshops provided by the Spring Institute, as well as the educational forums organized by the League of Women voters, as important learning opportunities. They also felt that the Muslim/Christian dialogue, which had finally been set for fall 2008, as something that should have been prioritized and held earlier. Members also expressed regret that they had not found a solution for providing driver's education. One member also shared the idea that ERRA members could have made better use of on-line chat or "the blogs." They suggested that an online forum could be used to collect community members' questions in advance of public events like the community meeting and to disseminate accurate information (ERRA, 2008b).

In their concluding remarks, many members wished that they had focused on these kinds of educational efforts early on to open communication and build trust between newcomers and established residents. Acknowledging the possibility that

Emporia would see the arrival of a new wave of newcomers in the future, members agreed that they would be ready to regroup and focus more immediately on bridging the gap

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusions

Refugees enter the United States legally. Though refugees are resettled in a few primary resettlement destinations, they have the right to travel and live in any part of the country. Refugees may receive support from the government for a maximum of eight months, and they are expected to find employment and become self-sufficient as soon as possible after arrival. Yet Somali refugees may face many barriers in the job market. Many are in the process of learning English. Many have been living in refugee camps and have little work experience to fill out their resumes. On top of this, they may encounter prejudice in the search for employment. They face intense pressure to find work to support not only themselves but also, in many cases, their families including family members in Africa. Many Somali refugees take the most undesirable jobs rather than remaining unemployed. Learning about job opportunities through social networks with other refugees, many have found relatively higher-paying low-skilled job opportunities in new immigration destinations like Emporia.

As shown in Chapter 4, Emporia's experience with an increasingly diverse population is not entirely unique. A growing number of immigrants and refugees are choosing to settle beyond traditional destinations in nonmetropolitan areas. These destinations tend to have declining native-born populations as well as plentiful low-skilled jobs. In new immigration destinations, communities may have little recent experience in receiving newcomers and may not have services in place to meet the

needs of a large population of culturally or linguistically diverse newcomers. A lack of resources for newcomers does not adequately explain the challenges that newcomers face in new destinations, however. It is also important to explore the reasons for unwelcoming attitudes that newcomers may encounter in new immigration destinations.

In Emporia, online forum users found various reasons to portray the Somali newcomers as an outside threat to the community. Their complaints touched on differences in class, language, religion, and culture and on fears that the newcomers would be a burden to the community.

Some comments in the forums characterized the refugees as poor people who would drain the city or county's social welfare resources or turn parts of Emporia into "slums." On the other hand, the vast majority of the Somali newcomers had come to Emporia to fill jobs, and another complaint that appeared frequently in the forum was that the newcomers were taking jobs from native-born workers. The idea that the Somali newcomers would drain welfare resources should be questioned since almost all of the Somalis in Emporia came to town to work.

Another barrier between Somali newcomers and established residents in Emporia was negative perceptions of religious differences. Interview respondents pointed out that many Emporians had limited personal experience with Muslims. Respondents speculated that many Emporians' perceptions of Islam were based on negative media images. While religion may at times provide a common ground between newcomers and established residents (as in the case of the Nuer refugees

mentioned in Chapter 3), in this case it served as another opportunity for misunderstandings between the Somalis and many Emporians.

Language was one of the primary barriers that respondents pointed out in interviews. Somali interpreting services were difficult to attain. A majority of the Somali newcomers engaged in English education, but at the same time most of them worked long hours in meatpacking, limiting the time that they could spend in the classroom. The time and energy required to learn English while working full time makes progress slow and difficult. Providing English language education for this population required flexible scheduling.

Some community leaders in Emporia believed that race also played a role in the community's reaction to the Somali newcomers. They pointed out that Emporians were intimidated because the Somalis were very "visible," or that they stood out from other members of the community. They also stressed that it was not only the color of their skin that was different. The Somalis dressed differently, spoke differently, and behaved differently. Interview respondents were more inclined to say that race played a role in the community reaction than the forum users. Forum users who openly opposed refugee resettlement in Emporia rarely referred to race, sometimes arguing that their complaints had nothing to do with race. They argued instead that the refugee population would present economic hardships, loss of jobs for native-born workers, or a threat to the community's health and safety.

Interview respondents also tended to interpret cultural conflicts as signs of the need for cross-cultural education, while a number of other Emporians viewed the

Somalis' actions as rude or hostile. Forum users complained that Somali men were rude in public, especially to women, and that they treated store employees with disrespect. Some interview respondents told stories of groups of Somalis gathering around police cars at traffic accident scenes. The police, they said, were at times uncomfortable because they were crowded while they tried to investigate the scene, while, respondents say, the Somalis were simply gathering around to find out if the Somalis involved in the accident were safe and to show support. Interview respondents tended to see these misunderstandings as signs of a need for better communication and understanding between newcomers and established residents.

Community leaders in new immigration destinations like Emporia who wish to smooth relations between newcomers and established residents may want to consider how all of these potential differences - race, religion, class, language, and culture – may be addressed in their efforts to create opportunities for cross-cultural education. Being aware that community members may have ambivalent feelings about race, they should discuss ways to bring open dialogue about race into the public sphere. Cross-cultural education should include frank discussion about language and the difficulty of learning another language. Interfaith dialogue could perhaps correct some misperceptions and ameliorate tensions arising from religious differences. Although attitudes toward newcomers are not likely to be easy to change, community leaders who strive to provide accurate information about these issues would perhaps counter rumors and negative misperceptions that could lead to strained relations between newcomers and established residents.

Many forum users who voiced opposition to refugee resettlement in Emporia often pointed out that their arguments had nothing to do with prejudice. Instead, they said, they were concerned about the toll on community resources or services. Community leaders faced with the task of responding to these fears were frequently confronted with questions regarding how much of the costs of refugee resettlement would fall on the shoulders of local taxpayers. Further study of the costs and as well as the benefits of immigration in destinations like Emporia would be helpful in providing answers to these questions. As long as community members focus only on the short-term costs of providing necessary services such as English language education or refugee health screenings, newcomers are more susceptible to receiving blame for straining community resources.

One possible long-term benefit of welcoming newcomers is population growth, especially in communities that have experienced shrinking native-born populations. In Emporia, the city has implemented the “Building Futures” campaign, described as a blueprint for development and growth. The campaign’s goals include creating more high-skilled jobs and enhancing cultural activities, housing, and the city’s image. The primary end of these goals is to promote population growth (Berlin 2008). Considering this emphasis on attracting new people to Emporia, the ways that the newcomers, if encouraged to stay, could contribute to the community’s growth and development should be explored.

The ERRA worked to address the fears of established residents and to facilitate communication between newcomers and established residents. Many

ERRA members felt that the most effective initiatives undertaken by either the ERRA or other community organizations or individuals were those events that created a meeting place for newcomers and established residents on an informal level. The ERRA's function as a point of interaction for service providers was not unimportant; these organizations needed to find solutions and to address common challenges including language and cultural barriers. Community leaders were able to share ideas and agencies found that they were better able to cope with changes brought about by the newcomers. However, the ERRA's role in creating cross-cultural education and interaction between established residents and newcomers became particularly important as misunderstandings and animosity refused to go away.

The ERRA interacted with other community organizations, such as Friends in Faith Serving Emporia. Friends in Faith first focused on creating dialogue between Hispanic and Somali community leaders. Friends in Faith members also arranged social events involving Somali newcomers and established residents. Several respondents saw the potluck arranged by Friends in Faith as one of the most successful events in welcoming the Somali newcomers into a social context outside of more impersonal service provider/client relationships, yet this event did not take place until a year and a half after the Somalis had first begun arriving in Emporia. ERRA members discussed holding a larger potluck, since the first one had attracted mainly Somali and Hispanic participants, but the ERRA disbanded before the plan came to fruition.

One goal of the ERRA was to close the distance between newcomers and established residents. One of the strategies for “bridging the gap” mentioned in the group’s mission statement was to bring Somali individuals to the table. ERRA members did build strong ties with some Somali individuals who provided valuable insight from the perspectives of newcomers at ERRA meetings. Somali participants explained the importance of the elders to the Somali community. ERRA members learned that if they could discuss issues with the elders, their messages would be more likely to reach more members of the Somali community. Still, Somali involvement in ERRA meetings was limited to a few participants per meeting. The group had discussed the idea of creating an advisory group of Somali elders so that more Somali individuals could contribute their concerns and ideas on a regular basis. This would have been a positive step in strengthening Somali involvement in the organization, but unfortunately the idea had not been put into practice when the group disbanded.

In retrospect, many ERRA members wished that public education efforts had started earlier. In ERRA meetings, it became clear that a lack of trust was creating not only tension between newcomers and established residents but also animosity toward outreach efforts or attempts to improve services to Somali newcomers. Established residents at times expressed anger at their community leaders for failing to “warn” them or prepare them for the arrival of Somali refugees in their community. Forum users accused city leaders, Tyson and the ERRA of being secretive and bringing refugees to town without the consent of Emporia citizens.

Finding a way to disseminate more accurate information about refugee resettlement early on may have eased some of the resentment felt by established residents.

Diversity did not leave Emporia with the Somali newcomers. This episode in Emporia's history sheds light on divisions that existed in town before the Somalis arrived. Incorporation of immigrants had been a difficult process before, and the marginalization of Hispanic newcomers lent to the resistance that the Somalis would face. In the ERRA's final meeting, one member brought up the fact that a "Diversity Council" had been established in Emporia in the 1990s, and that perhaps although the ERRA was disbanding, there was still a need for cross-cultural education in Emporia. Some community leaders in Emporia have expressed commitment to confronting of diversity. Although the story of the ERRA reveals the difficulty of altering public opinion, this is all the more reason that efforts to provide mediation between established residents and newcomers should be an ongoing process.

Face-to-face interaction is surely the most effective way for established residents and newcomers to learn about each other, but people must be willing to put themselves in these interactive situations. One site that presented an opportunity for interaction was the Ayan Café, and some established residents did venture out for a meal there. However, according to the owner, the rumors of tuberculosis scared many of his non-Somali customers away. The city council's decision to hold a meeting there was a wise move, showing that city leaders were not afraid to interact with the newcomers.

One thing that is demonstrated in the case of Emporia is the difficulty inherent in initiating cross-cultural education between newcomers and established residents. How can an organization like the ERRA transmit its message beyond those self-selected residents who choose to engage in cross-cultural exchange?

This study raises the question of what the role of the media should be in the incorporation of newcomers into new immigration destinations. Could the media function as a mediating structure? On one hand, it is difficult to see how the media may be a mediating structure at all, since it is not an arena for interaction between established residents and newcomers. But what if newcomers had been more involved in the media? What kind of stories would have been published if there had been more emphasis on the Somali perspective? Community leaders in new immigration destinations should take these questions into account.

The online forum changed the *Gazette* website from a news outlet where readers passively received the news to an interactive site where readers could publicize their own views and respond to other users. Users were so active in commenting on the refugee resettlement forum that city officials took notice of the concerns that were being expressed and decided to address those questions in a public meeting. The forum is where many who opposed refugee resettlement chose to engage in discussion. Perhaps one lesson that may be taken from this is that an organization that wishes to sway public perceptions and “bridge the gap” between newcomers and established residents must have a strong presence on the web. Face-to-face interaction between established residents and newcomers is of course ideal

and should be encouraged, but people cannot be forced to participate in informational or social events. In Emporia, some people dismissed the forum, saying that only a few vocal users were writing the most negative comments. Despite the negative tone of many of the comments, however, the forum also presented an opportunity to reach more Emporians in a forum from which they were clearly not shying away.

Some research has addressed the question of how media coverage may affect the incorporation of newcomers. For example, the organization Oxfam released a report in 2001 titled “Asylum: The Truth Behind the Headlines” (Mollard). The report addresses the tone of press coverage of asylum seekers in Scotland, and evaluates how asylum seekers were affected by the negative headlines. However, news headlines and articles are only a part of the information that is reaching the public regarding immigration. Interactive news websites are a fairly new phenomenon, and the possible effects of the discourse about immigration that takes place in these public forums should be explored. In Emporia, community leaders worried about the possible effects of the mostly negative comments posted by forum users. However, the online forum could also be seen as an opportunity for community leaders to infuse positive statements into the dialogue.

What, then, should be done to ease the integration of newcomers in new immigration destinations? First, the importance of being proactive in preparing the community cannot be understated. Community leaders should not wait for newcomers to arrive before grappling with issues of diversity. Open and frank

discussion about race, class, language, and culture are essential. Community leaders should explore ways to encourage a more inclusive concept of the community that does not marginalize newcomers, emphasizing the benefits that immigrants may bring to the community. Relations between established residents may also be improved if newcomers are empowered within community organizations that encourage dialogue and cooperation between both groups. Finally, the role of the media in integration must be explored further. The role of local newspapers must be seen as vital not only in communicating stories about the newcomers, but also in creating a link between newcomers and established residents, perhaps by soliciting feedback and stories from the newcomers themselves.

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Appendix I: Informed Consent Statement

Refugee Resettlement in the Midwest
Case Study: The Emporia Refugee Resettlement Alliance

INTRODUCTION

The University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This is the exploratory stage of a project that will examine the migration story of over 700 Somali refugees who settled in Emporia, KS between 2006 and 2008. The purpose of this project at this stage is to investigate the events that led to the founding of the Emporia Refugee Resettlement Alliance (ERRA), the services and events coordinated by the organization, and the effects of ERRA on both the refugee community and the wider community of Emporia. It has been suggested that ERRA should be a model for other communities in the process of receiving large numbers of immigrants. This project will examine how ERRA members identified the needs of the community and how they addressed these needs. It will also assess how information about this refugee community was disseminated not only within Emporia but also among other communities that were or will be experiencing refugee resettlement.

PROCEDURES

You will be asked questions regarding your involvement with the Emporia Refugee Resettlement Alliance and with the Somali community in Emporia. This interview may require 30 minutes or more. Audiotapes may be used to record the interview. These tapes will be used only by the researcher for the purpose of transcribing the dialogue.

RISKS

No risks to the subject are anticipated as a result of participation in the study.

BENEFITS

It is hoped that this study will raise awareness of the needs and experiences of new immigrant communities and of the ways that these migration stories are affected by the response of the receiving community.

PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS

Subjects will not be paid for participation in this study.

PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Your name will not be associated in any way with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. The researcher(s) will use a study number or a pseudonym instead of your name. The researchers will not share information about you unless required by law or unless you give written permission. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future.

REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Autumn Shields, 1743 Ohio St. Lawrence, KS 66044, Apt. 203. If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher(s) listed at the end of this consent form.

PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email dhann@ku.edu or mdenning@ku.edu.

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

Type/Print Participant's Name

Date

Participant's Signature

Researcher Contact Information

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Appendix II: Sample Interview Questions

1. What is your name?
2. What is your title/occupation?
3. When did you first become aware of the Somali community in Emporia?
4. How did you initially become involved with ERRA?
5. What were you hoping to accomplish by participating in ERRA?
6. Was there a need for services for refugees in the organization/agency that you work with?
7. Were there services in place for immigrants before the refugees arrived?
8. Did you personally interact with Somali individuals in your work?
9. Could you give some examples of how you worked with Somali individuals in our agency/organization?
10. How were members of the Somali community involved in the ERRA (or FFSE)?
11. How were members of the Hispanic community involved in ERRA (or FFSE)?
12. How did ERRA (or FFSE) members go about educating themselves or obtaining information about refugee resettlement?
13. To what extent were Somali individuals involved in this learning process?
14. An important part of ERRA meetings was “rumor control.” What were some of the rumors addressed by ERRA?
15. Why do you think there were so many rumors going around about the Somalis?
16. Do you think the ERRA discussions helped to counter the spread of rumors about the Somali refugees?
17. Where did Somalis interact with other residents outside of ERRA meetings and events?
18. How important were English language skills in their adjustment?
19. Do you think that the refugees’ Muslim faith affected the community’s reaction to them?
20. What do you think caused the most misunderstanding between Somalis and Emporians?
21. What would have been different if ERRA had not been organized? Or FFSE?
22. What did you know (or think) about Somalia before the arrival of the Somalis in Emporia?
23. Why do you think this community chose to settle in Emporia?
24. Why do you think so many members of the Somali community chose to work for Tyson?
25. How has your perception of Somalia changed?
26. Has your perception of immigration changed?
27. In what ways was the ERRA/FFSE successful in improving relationships between Emporians and immigrants or refugees?
28. In what ways could ERRA/FFSE have been improved?